SPATIAL ASPECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

A CASE STUDY OF SOUTH ASIAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN ATLANTA

by

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(Under the direction of Kavita Pandit)

ABSTRACT

Academic interest in domestic violence is about thirty years old, wherein various factors that cause domestic violence have been identified. Psychologists have examined the individual, sociologists have studied the family and feminists have studied the woman victim. In these efforts, the role pf space has been sidelined. Space in domestic violence is important because the abuse takes place within a definite spatial context, and this raises questions about the safety of home, spaces women victims consider safe, and how the social dichotomy of public and private space impacts these notions of safety. This thesis is based on a survey conducted amongst abused South Asian immigrant women who had sought refuge at *Raksha*, a support and referral network, in Atlanta. The focus is on seven women and this research examines their perspectives of home and safe space, and how isolation and social ethos regarding space, and immigration shape these notions.

Key words: Domestic Violence, home, isolation, *Raksha*, safe spaces, South Asian immigrant women.

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I partly dedicate this thesis to an unknown domestically abused woman in my hometown Bhubaneswar in India, who had escaped from her marital home in search of a safe space. Her decision to 'escape' was made soonafter a cyclone had lashed and ravaged the city for three long days. I don't know if the cyclone triggered her decision. It definitely obstructed the possibility of providing her with help. She had to return to her abuser's home.

I also dedicate this to the abused South Asian immigrant women who filled out the surveys, without whom this research would have been rendered meaningless. I am very thankful to *Raksha*, especially Aparna, Rita and Aqsa, for allowing me access to these women, for finding time to discuss with me about their work, for listening to me, and for their participation in this research.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of domestic violence[1] has been a socially acceptable behavior across different societies in the world for several centuries. The behavior was not considered to be against social order until the last one hundred years or so. That acts of violence against wives were a part of social order is evident from the fact that there was no intervention by the state (in different countries) for centuries in rescuing the victims of wife abuse or in punishing their husbands (Dobash and Dobash, 1979). In fact until the middle of the 19th century, the use of physical force by a man to chastise or correct his wife was regarded to be legal by the state in the United States and the United Kingdom (Kurz, 1989; Marsden, 1978).

In the late 19th century, a debate in England about 'wife torture' in the country was sparked after the woman's movement for suffrage took up the cause (Mooney, 2000; Stark, et al, 1988). However, it was not until the 1970s that wife abuse was acknowledged publicly. And, it has been only in the last thirty years that there has been a stimulation of academic interest in spousal aggression against wives. Initial work on domestic violence stemmed from the feminist movement in the 1970s (Herman, 1997). This interest was subsequently sustained within the disciplines of psychology, sociology and feminism.

Until recently, the development of interest within these disciplines in wife abuse essentially focused on the question of "why do men beat their wives?" And each

[1] By domestic violence, I largely refer to the abuse of women by their husbands. See Chapter 2 for full discussion.

discipline has had a different approach to exploring and theorizing the causes. Some social scientists studied domestic violence by studying the actions of individuals, both husband and wife. Others considered the family as one unit, and examined wife abuse in the larger framework of the family, its structure and violence (between different members) within the institution. They also argued that wife abuse could not be studied in isolation of other forms of family abuse (Strauss 1979). Yet other social science scholars studied domestic violence and its causes through the viewpoint of woman victims.

In these varied endeavors to theorize domestic violence and study factors contributing to domestic violence, the literature has been less sensitive to the spatial aspects of the problem and the relation of a woman to space. Yet domestic violence takes place within a very definite spatial context, which in turn contributes to a social conditioning that enables the incidences of abuse. There are different spatial considerations that deserve attention in the study of domestic violence. One aspect is the abused woman's notion of home, especially vis-à-vis delineations of public and private space. Space in domestic violence is important because the crime takes place inside the space delineated as home, within a space demarcated as private. In examining and investigating the spatial aspects of domestic violence, the geographer delves into how historical (and popular) conceptions about home and private space have proved to be a catalyst for domestic violence. Also, a matter of spatial importance in domestic violence is that of isolation of the wife from places she is familiar with, (such as her parental and/ or pre-marital home), and from places she is not familiar with (like her marital home).

Also important in the study of domestic violence for the geographer is the creation of safe spaces. It is partly because women have not found their homes to be safe and/ or their social milieu to be supportive that has led to the founding of shelters and organizations that provide help, support and advocacy (in addition to shelter) for

these women (Bowker and Maurer, 1986). Generally referred to as 'Women's organizations', these organizations and women's shelters are the places or spaces where abused women have sought and still seek refuge. An analysis of the evolution of these safe spaces and the role they play in alleviating the lives of battered women would make an interesting and important contribution to studies on domestic violence.

For some women, their immigrant status can pose an additional challenge to experience and subsequent response to abuse. Varying cultural and social backgrounds of immigrant women also greatly influence their attitude, reactions and responses to abuse and violence by their husbands (Acevedo, 2000). Immigration is not only a spatial upheaval, but also an emotional and cultural upheaval for women (as it is, presumably for their husbands). It is possible that this movement across national borders could tend to accentuate or worsen their ability or inability to navigate public and private spaces. Being away from home (and familial support) and from their homeland (and familiar culture and customs) generates an added sense of isolation, which gets spatially and socially manifested when they become victims of their husband's abuse.

SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

This study examines the spatial issues associated with domestic violence using the case study of domestically abused South Asian immigrant women living in Atlanta. Many of these women have come to the US in the last decade or so when there was a significant increase in the number of South Asians coming to Atlanta[2]. Accompanying this was a rise in the number of domestic violence cases in the community, eventually leading to the establishment of *Raksha*, a support network for South Asian abused

[2] According to the 2000 US Census, the population of Asian Indians (who comprise bulk of the South Asian population) alone, in Atlanta, has increased by over 75%: from 8998 in 1990 to 37162 in 2000 (US Census, 2000). Also, according to the 2000 US Census, Asian Indians comprise the largest Asian immigrant group in Atlanta.

women. In conducting this research I have worked closely with *Raksha* in gaining the participation of women who have experienced domestic abuse.

The broad objective of this research is to better understand the role of space in incidences of domestic violence, by exploring the concepts of home, isolation, and the dichotomy of public and private spaces, and by examining the creation of safe spaces such as *Raksha*. Specifically, the research addresses the following questions:

1. Do abused immigrant women consider home to be a safe space? What are their notions about home? Do their experiences of isolation have an impact on their notions of home? Do conceptions about public and private space influence their understanding of safe space?
2. How do safe spaces like *Raksha* develop? What role do they play as 'safe spaces'? How significant are they in terms of providing an alternate safe space for immigrant women?

This thesis is organized as follows. Chapter two discusses the literature on domestic violence within various social sciences, and highlights the role of space in incidences of domestic violence. It also discusses the specific challenges faced by immigrant women and provides a context for examining the case of South Asian immigrant women. In chapter three, I discuss my research design and methodology, and present the profile of the research participants. I present the discussion of my research findings in chapter four, and the major conclusions of my research in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, IMMIGRANT WOMEN AND SPACE

DEFINING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence refers to the use of violence by one member of the family (which may or may not be sanctioned by marriage) against another member of the family (Berry, 1998; Strauss, 1979). Often used synonymously with family violence, domestic violence can include wife abuse, child abuse, sibling abuse, elderly abuse and husband abuse (Berry, 1998). In general, it provides an all-encompassing term to distinguish the violence occurring within the household from violence occurring outside the home (Mooney, 2000).

Mooney (2000) points to a debate amongst researchers with regard to the usage of the term 'domestic violence', because the word, 'domestic' could refer to cohabiting couples (both heterosexual and homosexual), to married couples, to children, to parents, to the elderly, to dating relationships, and to post-relationship violence as well. Feminist scholars consider the term 'domestic violence' as very gender-neutral, especially as it does not clarify the gender identities of the perpetuator and the victim (Mooney, 2000; Bograd, 1988). Indeed, the tendency of the state and policy makers to use the very general term, domestic violence, has been critiqued by researchers because each type of violence within the household involves different actors, needs and concerns (Mooney, 2000).

This study focuses on wife abuse, a term used to refer to the violent and abusive behavior of a husband toward his wife (Bograd, 1988). Some feminists refer to wife

abuse as patriarchal terrorism (Johnson, 1995), while others term the spaces within which these incidents of abuse occur as domestic concentration camps (Herman, 1997). In the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and France, the use of physical force by a man to 'correct', or 'chastise' his wife was considered legal by the state and its machinery until the middle of the 19th century (Kurz, 1989; Marsden, 1978). Davidson (1977) has traced the reason for the legalization of such a crime to the biblical theory on the creation of the first man and woman. However, even after wife abuse (wife beating, in particular) was outlawed by legislation, both the law and the state have condoned the crime in different ways (Davidson, 1977). Levinson (1988) has referred to several ethnographies, which report the prevalence of violence against wives in different tribes and societies across different continents to show that wife abuse is not solely a Western phenomenon. Ancient Hindu laws, for instance, deemed that men must make their women dependent, day and night, and that it was necessary to subjugate them for their own good (Doniger and Smith, 1991). According to Ayuub (2000: 242), the Quran, the religious text of Islam, advocates "the use of admonition and the right of a man to beat his wife if he fears willfulness from her".

It may be noted that many scientists tend to use the terms domestic violence and wife abuse as inclusive of only physical acts of violence. Some researchers interpret this as an implication that physical violence is worse than psychological abuse or mental cruelty, or that the latter is less abusive (Mooney, 2000; Bograd, 1988). According to Forward in Berry (1988:1), abuse is " . . . any behavior that is intended to control and subjugate another human being through the use of fear, humiliation, and verbal and physical assaults . . . it is the systematic persecution of one partner by another". According to research conducted in the United Kingdom, some women (victims) view verbal, psychological and economic (using money to exert control) abuse as a worse experience than physical abuse (Winston, 2001; Mooney, 2000). Research conducted in

Sweden shows that verbal abuse is often a prelude to physical abuse, and that both forms of abuse are often linked (Hydén, 1995). Non-physical acts of violence are often seen as a husband's way of exerting control on his wife (Mooney, 2000; Hydén, 1995). While physical violence leaves scars on the body, non-physical violence leaves scars on the mind. Both these types of violence are traumatizing for the victim, both during the incidence of abuse and after. Though physical violence carries a potential danger to life, what makes acts of non-physical violence (perhaps) more harmful is that no one can 'see' it. This leads to the further victimization of the wife. A singular focus on either forms of abuse would mean undermining the other. A study of domestic violence would, therefore, be incomplete without taking into consideration incidences of non-physical violence.

For the purpose of this study, the terms 'wife abuse' and 'domestic violence' shall be used interchangeably to mean the same thing. Further, in this study, the phrases domestic violence and wife abuse shall imply both physical and non-physical acts of violence committed by the husband on his wife.

With this history as a background, I move on now to discuss the evolution of different theoretical perspectives on domestic violence in social science.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Since 1970, several different theories and perspectives on domestic violence and wife abuse have emerged within social sciences. These theories can be broadly classified into three categories: the psychological perspective, the family violence perspective and the feminist perspective.

1. Psychological Perspective

The psychological perspective on domestic violence examines violence as stemming from the personal characteristics of, and the dynamic relationship between individual women and men (Abraham, 2000; Bograd, 1988). The focus of the researcher (with this perspective) is on the individual personalities of the husband and wife. Further, according to the psychological approach violent behavior is rare and abnormal in men and, to a large extent implicates women in their own battery (O'Neill, 1995; Bograd, 1988).

Early studies on domestic violence characterized the crime as uncommon and an abnormal phenomenon, and blamed the husband's alcoholism and drug abuse (Abraham, 2000; O'Neill, 1998; Bograd, 1988; Prescott, et al, 1988; Gayford, 1978; Roy, 1977). These studies also cite a man's involvement in violence outside the home as responsible for his violent behavior towards his wife. In the early and mid-20th century psychologists theorized causes of domestic violence on the individual husband's lack of impulse control, his genetic abnormality and/ or aggressive drive (Bograd, 1988; O'Leary, 1988). He has been variously identified as a psychopath, a sociopath, neurotic and disturbed (Mooney 2000). According to Shainess (1977) people tend to vent their frustrations on the others who are close to them, and therefore, it is understandable why men have a propensity to assault their wives. Researchers also draw from the psychological theory on social learning, according to which, human beings learn all of their behavior through observations and experiences, to explain the abuse of wives (O'Neill, 1998; O'Leary 1988; Dobash and Dobash, 1979). Social scientists use this approach to argue that an individual will perform those acts that s/he has learnt (and seen) at an earlier age. And thus, they assert, "violent behavior is learned through observation and trial and error reinforcements" (O'Neill, 1998: 468). Very often, the

husband's history of mental illness and childhood abuse are also analyzed as causes of his usage of violence in adulthood (O'Neill, 1998; Bograd, 1988; Roy, 1977).

Early studies on domestic violence also found fault with the wife and identified domestic violence as the fulfillment of a woman's needs (Abraham, 2000; O'Neill, 1998; Bograd, 1988; Prescott, et al, 1988; Gayford, 1978; Roy, 1977). This approach has classified the abused wife as masochistic, paranoid, disturbed, neurotic, mentally ill, sexually inadequate, or in a complete contradiction, overbearing, having masculine inclinations, being over sexual, or possessive of some similar characteristic (Mooney, 2000; O'Neill, 1998). These early studies saw (any of) these as reason enough to provoke the violent behavior of the husband. Shainess (1977), for instance, holds the woman responsible for her own abuse, by reasoning that a woman had an abusive husband because people with neurotic needs sought and chose partners of a similar emotional level. According to her, the woman often has a masochistic personality (she equates this with low self-esteem, instead of 'enjoyment of suffering'), and that it was essential to examine such traits.

Domestic violence, in early psychological studies, has also been considered to be a solution to mutual needs and problems of marital partners (O'Neill, 1998; Bograd, 1988; Prescott, et al, 1988; Gayford, 1978; Roy, 1977). Some psychologists have also classified incidents (pertaining to arguments over money, jealousy, sexual problems, etc.) that (could possibly) trigger an incident of abuse as 'a cause' of wife abuse (Roy, 1977). According to Dobash and Dobash (1979), some psychologists refer to a 'subculture of violence' (that within certain societal groups, violent behavior exists as a sub cultural pattern) as a justification for domestic violence.

The psychological perspective on domestic violence has been critiqued by family violence theorists and feminists not only for its focus on individuals, but also because its analytical efforts tend to condone the husband's actions. They also argue that domestic

violence was neither abnormal nor rare, as psychological approach believed it to be. They argue that there needs to be greater attention paid to the cultural, societal, and contexts within which abuse takes place.

2. Family Violence Perspective

Broadening the approach of psychologists, the family violence perspective regards the family as the basic unit of analysis in cases of domestic violence. According to Kurz (1989), the main proponents of the family violence perspective on domestic violence have been Murray Straus and Richard Gelles. The main contention of these two sociologists has been that violence is normative in the family, and that family is the most violent institution, and that this (the norm) is because violence in the family is statistically frequent, is endorsed by culture and society, and is approved by the perpetuator (Gelles and Straus, 1990; 1979). Further, Gelles and Straus do not confine family violence to incidences of wife abuse. According to them, family violence in addition to wife abuse also includes child abuse, sibling abuse, parent abuse, elderly abuse and husband abuse. Wife abuse is but an element in the pattern of family violence, and cannot be studied in isolation of these other forms of violence in the family (Kurz, 1989). Gelles and Straus (1990; 1979) identify three reasons for violence within American families: first that modern-day American living, which is stressful (because of stressed work conditions, unemployment, financial insecurity, etc.), causes family members to be violent towards each other; second, that the family, just like society, views violence as acceptable (as depicted by the media and in literature); and third, families socialize their children into violence from an early age.

Several family violence theorists have addressed the issue of balance of power within the family as causative to violence (Lenton, 1995; Bersani et al. 1988). Bersani, et al (1988) draw analogies between Karl Marx's theories on the formation of social classes

(resulting from power differentials and the balance of resources in the society) and the balance of power within the family to explain domestic violence. This theory is often referred to as Resource Theory or the Power theory (Bersani et al. 1988; Lenton, 1995). Some sociologists believe that the exercise of power and aggression by American husbands is not a legacy of patriarchy, but because husbands are capable of, and "can contribute more resources to the family" (Bersani et al. 1988: 60). According to Bersani et al, some resource theorists believe that a spouse may use violence as a last resort to persuade a partner (who lacks or has relatively less resources) to perform or behave in a particular way. Some family theorists assume that power (defined by the ability to have more resources as compared to other family members) can be held by either the husband or the wife and argue that the 'most powerful' member of the family tends to use violence to assert her/ his dominance (Kurz, 1989). Yet other theorists look at the inequitable distribution (sometimes the equal distribution) of resources and resultant different classes; and attribute the occurrence of family violence to low resources within the family (Kalmuss et al. 1990; Bersani et al. 1988), and thus, infer that family violence is a phenomenon characteristic of low-income families. Some family theorists also draw attention to the perceived inconsistent status of the husband in the family (because of his low education level or low skill), which makes the man feel that his superior status in the family is threatened, and he resorts to violence to preserve his perceived superior status (Bersani et al. 1988). Consequent upon this is their argument that a woman's demand or quest for equality (arising out of education or financial independence) within the family accentuates violence against her.

Some sociologists draw analogies between the family and a systematic structure having interdependent parts and processes (relationships within the family), and consequently argue that violence in the family is the outcome of the system, and not because of individual pathology (Bersani et al. 1988). Giles-Sim (1983) argues that

social structural conditions relate to an individual's behavior in the context of wife abuse, and that an individual's interaction with the societal conditions regulates abusive behavior. Social structural conditions, according to Giles–Sim, include the patriarchal nature of society, class structure, and the level of violence within the society.

Although family violence theorists move away from the focus on the individual, their findings are often oversimplified. Household structures have been becoming increasingly diverse, and the experience of abuse in each situation may be difficult to generalize. Further, this perspective does not focus on the structural conditions within society that allow wife abuse to take place. Feminists, in particular, have called for greater attention to the significance of patriarchy, and its impact on wife abuse (Bograd, 1988).

3. Feminist Perspectives

Several scholars have attributed the public recognition of domestic violence as a social problem to the feminist movement over different time spans (Mooney, 2000; Herman, 1997; Yllö, 1989; Dobash and Dobash, 1979). In the latter half of the 19th century, the woman's movement for suffrage (often called the first-wave-feminist movement) also expressed its outrage at wife abuse (its focus being wife beating), challenged the portrayal of women as responsible for their battery, and the inadequate provisions in the legal system to address the issue (Mooney, 2000). Following the First World War, the initial outrage generated by the feminists on wife abuse all but disappeared with the hibernation of the feminist movement. With the revival of the feminist agenda in 1970, concerns about domestic violence resurfaced. The feminist movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s (often referred to as the second-wave-feminist movement) brought the issue of domestic violence, once again, to public awareness (Mooney, 2000; Yllö, 1988), but this time as a widespread social problem.

The feminist movement of the 1970s also sparked off a serious, and a more diverse academic interest in wife abuse within the social science community (O'Neill, 1998).

According to Mooney (2000), liberal feminists were the first to question and challenge the prevalence of violence against wives and the domination of men in the public sphere. However, their goal was largely to achieve equality with men, the lack of which, they believed, was the cause of oppression on women. This has been intensely critiqued by socialist and radical feminists. Socialist or Marxist Feminism has basically been an anti-capitalist movement, where some scholars viewed housework as beneficial to the capitalist agenda, and, that therefore, the oppression of women was due to the capitalist agenda (Mooney, 2000). According to Mooney (2000), a dual systems theory was proposed by some socialist feminists, which argued that the oppression of women could be comprehended only by analyzing both capitalism and patriarchy. Unlike the liberal and socialist forms of feminism, radical feminism considers patriarchy as central to a woman's oppression. Radical feminists refer to women as 'a class' and to men as 'another class', and that men 'as a class' oppress women 'as a class' (Mooney, 2000; Bograd, 1988). They also argue that women are dominated and oppressed both in their public and private lives (Mooney, 2000). The radical feminist overview on wife abuse goes beyond the issue by critiquing what they call the positivist paradigm of social science, which according to them has remained indifferent and insensitive to issues of gender and feminism (Yllö, 1988).

Despite epistemological differences within the discipline, the feminist perspective focuses on the woman, the victim of domestic abuse, with an objective to understand the phenomena through the individual victim's viewpoint. As opposed to the 'only' quantitative studies by the family violence theorists, feminists largely conduct in-depth qualitative studies (in addition to some quantitative studies) towards a more comprehensive understanding of the problem of domestic violence. Though feminists do

consider sociological and psychological factors, their main concern is the “global pervasiveness of violence and its acceptability” (Abraham, 2000: 5). Despite the different epistemological approaches of different feminist scholars, they all ask the same question: “Why do men, in general, use physical force against their partners, and what functions does this serve for a given society in a specific historical context?”(Bograd, 1988: 13).

According to the feminist perspective, it is the relating of women’s experiences from their frames of reference that will provide an actual comprehension of the violence and abuse meted out to them (Bograd, 1988). Any other perspective would distort the understanding of the crime and its trauma on the woman, given the prevalence of male dominance on the women’s lives. And, while examining the woman victim’s perspective, feminist scholars also examine the social construct of gender, the gendered construct and structure of society, and challenge the cultural ideal of family (and home), and the ‘abnormality’ of wife abuse in the family, and how this relates to the woman’s experience of abuse (Bograd).

This perspective also examines the role of patriarchy in the relations between husband and wife, the exercise of control by the husband over his wife and the historic condoning of the crime by the state and its institutions (Kurz, 1989; Dobash and Dobash, 1979). It also challenges the patriarchal nature of social science (especially as a critique of the quantitative approach of family violence theorists), and the methods involved, by pointing out that such methods fail to recognize a woman’s experience of domestic violence (Yllö, 1988).

According to Abraham (2000), women’s experiences are replete with multiple oppressions, vis-à-vis gender, class, race, and immigrant (legal) status. She, therefore, developed the “Ethno-gender” approach to understanding domestic violence in the lives of immigrant women, and specifically used it to study South Asian immigrants in the

United States. Abraham (2000: 6) defines the ethno-gender approach as " the multiple intersection of ethnicity, gender, class, and legal status as significant categories in the analysis of domestic violence with a special emphasis on ethnicity and gender". According to Abraham, to focus on gender alone is to deny the cultural distinctions that define wife abuse and an immigrant woman's experience of it. She also points out that a singular focus on male domination and female subordination is akin to ignoring other types of disparity (specifically that of race and class) in the United States. Abraham further asserts that different attitudes and perceptions (of both the perpetuator and the victim), experiences, reactions and responses to domestic violence can only be understood through the analysis of gender relations together with the cultural context.

Taken together the psychological, family violence and the feminist perspectives have given us a rich understanding of the multifarious causes of domestic violence. Yet they fall short in two areas. First of all, neither the psychologists nor the family theorists have examined the significance of space in domestic violence. And, although feminists raised questions pertaining to notions of space, they have not delved into how these notions in tandem with a woman's cultural upbringing can influence her experience and response to abuse. The ethno-gender approach addressed important issues of race, class and immigrant status of women vis-à-vis domestic violence, and although it addresses isolation, its focus is on social, not spatial isolation.

Secondly, although the feminist approach took into consideration the perspective of the woman victim, their focus had been confined to white women. And, although radical feminism critiqued liberal and socialist feminism as being a movement of all white and middle-class women, its examination of wife abuse has not incorporated the experiences of immigrant and other minority women (Mooney, 2000). Studying the incidence of domestic violence in immigrant and different minority communities is important because each community has diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, because of

which women from disparate communities have separate experiences, reactions and responses to domestic violence.

ROLE OF SPACE

Space has different and several meanings. Its conceptualization varies across societies; its meaning and interpretations vary across academic disciplines (Crang and Thrift, 2000; Harvey, 1990). Geographers contend that space is one of the two basic dimensions of human life, the other being time (Kellerman, 1989). At the same time, some argue that space is not an independent dimension, and that it cannot be studied in isolation of time, just as time cannot be studied independent of space (Crang and Thrift, 2000; Massey, 1994; Kellerman, 1989). Geographers also contend that space and social relations are interdependent, inseparable, and that both are dynamic and ever-changing (Massey, 1994; Harvey, 1990). And, there are some who view space to be exhaustive, and a "frame of reference for actions" (Rose, 1993; Werlen, 1993: 3).

According to Massey (1994), there is a very intricate relationship between space and the construction and understanding of gender. This relationship has been the focus of recent geographical and feminist academic endeavors (Rose, 1993). There is an undeniably close link between a woman's occupation, usage and mobility in and within space, and the construction of her space, all of which have been determined, implemented and controlled by patriarchal power over different time periods and in different spaces (Katz and Monk, 1993; Rose, 1993). While some geographers have focused on the 'gendering' of spaces and places and its consequent implications in the construction and understanding of gender in different societies (Massey, 1994), others have talked about the close relationship of geography and feminism (Rose, 1993). Yet others have discussed about how women's identities are constructed and performed across space (Bell and Valentine, 1995). The works of these geographers demonstrate

the increasing awareness and attention within the discipline to the relation of women and space.

There are at least two different spatial considerations that deserve attention in the study of domestic violence: the interconnected notions of home and safe spaces. A discussion on these two spatial aspects is not mutually exclusive, as the forthcoming pages shall show. At the same time, a discussion on home vis-à-vis domestic violence merits a separate discussion. As I discuss the spatial aspect of home, I find it difficult not to incorporate other spatial aspects (like spatial isolation and notions of public-private space) that have considerable significance in situations of domestic violence, and more so in the case of immigrant women.

According to Spain (1992), the home is a spatial institution because it is a space where the institution of family dwells, and where family-related activities occur. Després (1991), in her analysis of different interpretations and perspectives of home, found that although 'home' is interpreted differently by different people and societies, it is largely considered a refuge from the outside world and is a place that provides a sense of physical security. According to Sibley (1995), a house in the American culture is considered to be a space of safety from threats, both human and non-human, and the home is a refuge, a source of comfort and an oasis in a world of conflict.

Tognoli (1991: 655) defines home as "... both a physical and a cognitive concept". According to him, research on home over the last few years has moved from an emphasis on the physical and the spatial to the social, cognitive, cultural and behavioral aspects. And, it was the latter set of perspectives that associated home with security and comfort. That the home is a safe place and a haven is particularly reiterated in the case of women (Mooney, 2000; Sibley, 1995; Bograd, 1988). In fact, Rochelau (2002) avers that home is a place where women are kept in their place. However, Spain (1992) asserts that with more and more women stepping out of these spatial institutions

to participate in the labor force and other 'public' institutions, 'home as a haven' is gradually losing its appropriateness.

Across different societies, the 'home' has historically been delineated as a woman's place, the private space, the inner space, the feminine space, very different from the masculine, public and outer space, and the only place where she should (and could) stay (Rose, 1993; Janeway, 1971). That a woman's proper place was at home was ordained into the body of state law in ancient, medieval and modern times (up to mid-19th century) (Kurz, 1989; Dobash and Dobash, 1980; Marsden, 1978). Though it is no longer legislated in (different) state laws that a woman's place is in her home, in current times, attacks on women in spaces outside their home are often interpreted as a warning for her to remain confined to her assigned space, home (Rose, 1993), and away from the outside, the public space, which is a dangerous place for her (Radford and Stanko, 1996; Pain, 1991). Though there is less of a physical dichotomy in the usage of space today, women are still regarded as belonging to their designated space, home. And, it is this very view that makes a woman increasingly vulnerable to violence both inside and outside her home (Rose, 1993; Pain, 1991).

Rose (1993) also regards the 'home' as one half of the dichotomy between private and public space. The private space (home) was the domestic or feminine space as opposed to the masculine (public) space of work and politics, and there were distinct, boundaries, visible and invisible, between the two (Mooney, 2000; Rose, 1993; Pain 1991). Rose (1993) argues that a woman's movement in public spaces is often restricted (and controlled) because her ideal and proper space is deigned to be the domestic sphere. According to Massey (1994), the confining of women to the home and the private space was an exercise of control on her space, her mobility and her identity. Referring to the gendered division of space as spatial segregation, Spain (1992) says

that this separation denies a woman access to knowledge, thus, allowing men to retain and exercise power and privilege inside the home and outside.

Although different geographers refer to this dichotomy of public and private space, there exists at the same time a debate within the discipline about the ambiguity surrounding the actual nature of this dichotomy (Valentine, 2001; Staeheli, 1996). According to Staeheli, different scholars define public and private space on the basis of different criteria, and these definitions indicate permeable boundaries and scope for overlap (of actions and activities), thus, challenging the very dichotomy of the public and the private. However, although the dichotomy of space on gendered grounds has been challenged academically, it is immensely powerful socially, especially for certain groups and religions.

According to ancient Hindu laws, a woman needs to be guarded at all times for her own good and the good of her family (Doniger and Smith, 1991). Further, it was only her confinement within her home that could keep her safe. Her movement outside the space defined as ‘home’ was controlled and monitored by the men in the family and the society. ‘Home’ was her space, her domain and her place; and that was where she was supposed to be. And, as long as she abided by these delineations of space, she was assigned some denomination of respect (Doniger and Smith, 1991). According to Ayuub (2000), similar notions are reiterated in Islam, where women are advised to confine themselves to the four walls of their homes for their personal protection.

In contrast to the home, the public space was portrayed (by the state, by the family and by the media) as potentially dangerous to the safety and well being of women (Rose, 1993). It was not the place for women to be in, and if there was any reason for her to step out of the safeness of her home, she was not to go out unescorted. Pain (1991) argues that the media and government crime prevention programs (for instance) assign meanings of fear and danger (for women) to public places. Thus, reiterating that

a woman's body and mind could be safe only within the confines of the private space, her home. Pain (1991) further argues that this fear women have of latent violence in the public place restricts them from participating actively, wholly and freely in public activities. As a consequence, they tend to confine much of their daily activities to their homes, and make themselves increasingly dependent on their men for security and protection. This, Pain (1991) asserts, leads to an increase in violence against women not only in the public but also in the private spheres.

Although the public space was delineated as that of a man's, his control and domination extended to the private space as well. According to Mooney (2000), the state views the home as a personal space, a place where a policy of least state interference is reinforced. This affects women, especially those who are abused, in that the husband gets to (legally) wield power and control in the home, and there is uncertainty as to help by the state.

Spatial and social isolation is another spatial consideration within the larger discussion surrounding home. An individual experiences isolation when s/he is spatially or culturally separate from a society or community. According to researchers, wives are either not allowed to develop any social networks outside of their homes, or are encouraged (or coerced) to withdraw from existing social and familial relationships and networks in the early periods following marriage, and their mobility outside the home is monitored, and, often, denied (Singh and Unnithan, 1999; Dobash and Dobash, 1979). This prevents them from forming new relationships and/ or networks or gaining access to pre-existing ones. Dobash and Dobash (1979) also argue that the purpose of these endeavors at spatial and social isolation is a display of patriarchal assertion and possessiveness.

Isolation becomes particularly relevant in the case of immigrant women as their non-familiarity with the language, culture, etc., of the host country restrains their mobility,

denies them access to knowledge about the availability of support services, and more importantly, limits their accessibility to assistance following incidences of violence (Abraham, 2000; Acevedo, 2000, Mehrotra, 1999; Jang, et al, 1990). According to Abraham (2000), research has shown that social isolation poses an added risk to the incidence of wife abuse. The isolation of a woman may result from any or all of the following factors, each of which may even affect the other, and accentuate the potential risk of wife abuse: lack of geographic mobility, lack of a social network, spatial or otherwise, language barriers, cultural constraints, and financial dependency (Abraham, 2000).

DOMESTIC ABUSE IN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

There is an abundance of literature on domestic violence. A majority of these works, however, focus exclusively on the experiences of white women, and for a long time, the experiences of non-white women was not considered as different or separate. The feminist perspective on wife abuse in recent years, for instance, has largely been a radical feminist one, with a focus essentially on patriarchy. Although radical feminists acknowledge that a woman's experience is replete with multiple oppressions, the feminist approach to the problem of wife abuse has empirically remained generally indifferent to the issues of race, ethnicity and legal (vis-à-vis immigration) status of abused women (Abraham, 2000; Lenton, 1995; Bograd, 1988). The family violence perspective is largely based on the findings obtained from national (American) level surveys conducted by Gelles and Strauss (1990; 1979), and these too, don't take into consideration race, class, or immigrant status of the victims of abuse.

In her study of Japanese immigrant women, Yoshihama (2000) argues that the experiences of domestic violence by non-white women are seriously understudied in the United States. According to Yoshihama, most analyses of domestic violence have failed

to incorporate a multitude of socio-cultural factors, which significantly and differently impact the experiences (of violence by their spouses) of non-White women. Yoshihama, in her analysis, further points out the intrinsic flaws in studies of domestic violence in major racial groups in the US, in that there has been a complete disregard for socio-cultural variations.

Acevedo (2000), in her research on Mexican immigrant women, has addressed the need to call attention to spousal violence in the Mexican community in the US. Yick et al (1997), and Lee (2000), in their respective works on Chinese-Americans, reiterate the necessity of incorporating the influence of culture and ethnicity on the abuse of women. Yick et al (1997: 832) argue that although the risk of domestic violence in Asian immigrant families is high because of the community's susceptibility to "acculturative stress and gender role reversal in a new country" in addition to other stress factors like unemployment and underemployment, national-level studies have not studied these communities. So, although studies on domestic violence in immigrant communities have been emerging on the academic scene, there has been a simultaneous emphasis on the need for more intensive and focused research on the experiences of immigrant women.

Academicians also interpret the attitude, involvement and intervention of the state and its machinery (specifically, the police) as indifferent, inadequate and ill equipped (specifically, in connection with linguistic shortcomings) to handle complaints from abused immigrant women (Acevedo, 2000; Preisser, 1999).

The passing of two immigration acts in the country in 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) and the Immigrant Marriage Fraud Act (IMFA), further aggravated the situation of abused immigrant women (Jang, et al, 1990). The IRCA made it difficult for undocumented immigrants (which includes individuals whose visas have expired as well as those who have entered the country illegally) to get employment and public benefits. The IMFA complicated the process by which individuals obtained

legal status in the country through one's spouse (Jang et al.). This had serious repercussions in the case of abused women. The IMFA made it hard for a woman to leave her abusive husband and the IRCA made it difficult for her to get employment in such an eventuality. According to Jang et al (1990), the passage of these two acts had the effect of reducing the legal and social resources available to abused immigrant women, and made it difficult for them to provide for themselves and their children in the likelihood of their separation from their abusive husbands.

Given this, the passage of the 1998 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was a landmark for abused immigrant women for it gave them the opportunity to seek the help of law enforcement, irrespective of the legality of their immigrant status. According to this act, an abused immigrant woman, who had lived in the United States for at least three years, and was able to provide, in a court of law, proof of abuse by her husband, would be allowed to stay in the country till a decision was made about her immigrant status. However, the condition pertaining to the woman's duration of residence in the United States denies several abused immigrant women access to the advantages of this act (http://www.now.org/issues/vawa/).

Abraham (2000) in her research on South Asian immigrant women argues that the absence of reference to the experiences of South Asian immigrant women in situations of domestic abuse speaks of a conspicuous gap in the domestic violence literature. This is because this woman's immigrant status and her cultural background make her experience, reactions and response to a situation of domestic violence very unique and different (Abraham, 2000; Preisser, 1999). A South Asian woman is often dependent on her husband's sponsorship for her immigrant status and abusive husbands often use this dependence as a means to control, subjugate and abuse their wives (Dasgupta, 2000; Preisser, 1999). Abraham (2000:45) calls the inability of an

immigrant woman to leave her abusive husband because of this dependence, the "immigrant status factor".

Over the last decade or so academic research in North America and Europe has been incorporating studies of domestic violence within immigrant families, including South Asian families. And what has emanated from these works on violence against wives in South Asian immigrant communities is that there are several unique structural and cultural factors that contribute to the incidences and responses to wife abuse in this diaspora (Abraham, 2000). Also, that it is difficult to understand the dynamics of the crime, and the nature of the relationship between the perpetuator and his victim, given the inherent discreteness and secrecy (and, a tendency to disregard by non-victims and non-perpetuators) amongst the members of the community (Abraham).

THE SOUTH ASIAN CULTURAL CONTEXT

In order to understand the cultural context of violence in the South Asian immigrant families, it would be useful to examine the social norms, traditions, religious practices and ideas that have traveled with the immigrants from their countries of origin, and how they have been maintained down and across different generations.

Religious and social practices in the countries of South Asia strongly contribute to a social and cultural milieu that is favorable to incidences of abuse and violence against wives. Violence against wives is illegal in India and the rest of South Asia. Yet, the patriarchal nature of the family, community and society makes wives highly vulnerable to abuse. Ayuub (2000) and Rahim (2000), in their separate studies, examine the possible role of religion (more specifically, of Hinduism and Islam) on the incidence of wife abuse. According to their interpretations of Hindu and Islamic religious texts, wife abuse has not been recommended or advised. They concede, however, that the two religions delineate a woman's usage of space, among other things. According to Rahim

(2000), although the texts of both religions entail that women are to be respected and honored, it is those portions of the texts that refer to subjugating women that have found prominence in contemporary society.

South Asian women are socialized from childhood and through adolescence to unquestioningly and acquiescently mold into the roles 'prescribed' for her by her religion, her culture, her society, her community, and her family (Ayuub, 2000). This acquiescence was the only thing that posed a chance, if any, for her to be assigned any respect (Ayuub, 2000; Doniger and Smith, 1991). According to Sheehan, et al (2000), South Asian daughters are brought up in a manner that it is ingrained in them to remain in deference to their husbands, consider themselves subordinate to them, and place virtue (synonymous with virginity and chastity), honor (that comes essentially from upholding virtue), and marital stability as the most important things in life. Sheehan, et al, argue that this upbringing, often, is such that education and financial independence do little to surmount the belief in 'male superiority'. Marriage for women in this community is a lifelong commitment, and the belief in it is complete, strong and unwavering, even in the light of abuse (Merchant, 2000). This upbringing, to a considerable extent, is what obliges a woman to live with and endure her abusive husband, and also deters her from seeking (outside) help following an incident (or incidents) of abuse against her. Ayuub (2000), points out that although many South Asian Muslim women are educated and working, they are simultaneously expected to enact their traditional roles within the household and home.

Despite having adapted and acculturated (at different levels) to life in the United States, Asian Indians still retain their traditional values regarding home[3], marriage, family, children and religion (Singh and Unnithan, 1999; Dasgupta, 1998). Maintaining traditional customs and culture by "reinventing the Indian culture on foreign soil" has

[3] Please refer discussion in section titled 'Role of Space' in Chapter II.

been a major endeavor to retain the social order followed in their native country (Dasgupta, 1998: 954). Part of the tradition that has traveled with the South Asian woman (and her family) to the United States has been that of putting her husband, their marriage, her family and her home above herself (Abraham, 2000; Dasgupta, 1998). Dasgupta (1998), further, argues that preserving and maintaining these values and passing them down to their children has remained the responsibility of women in the community.

The portrayal of the South Asian community in the United States as a 'model-minority' is another reason that has been a hindrance to the reporting of acts of domestic violence for there is a fear, at large by the community, of tarnishing that image (Abraham, 2000). 'Model-minority', according to Abraham, is a socially constructed myth in the United States that implies that certain ethnic groups fare better than other ethnic groups, economically and socially, in mainstream American society. According to Abraham, the problem with such an image is that it consistently pressurizes the members of the community to manipulate their collective identity so as to uphold the image of 'model minority'. So, in addition to being responsible for the upkeep of the family's honor by following its traditions and cultural values, South Asian women are also required to maintain the community's image of being a model minority group in a foreign land and this is also why incidences of domestic violence in South Asian families often go unreported. Further, in order to uphold this image, the community at large has felt the need to ignore and deny the existence and occurrence of wife abuse (and other social concerns) within it (Chhabra, 2002; Abraham, 2000; 1995; Wong, et al, 1998).

Women and space, as indicated in the previous section, have a complex relationship. In the case of South Asian women, the complication of this relationship has been part of a woman's socialization through her growing years. According to ancient Hindu laws, a woman's responsibilities and duties are restricted to the confines of her

home- her place- yet it is a place where she still remains under the control of her husband (Doniger and Smith, 1991:115). According to these laws, it is a husband's duty to guard his wife against the possibility of infidelity, and since this cannot be enforced, he needs to engage his wife in domestic activities. A woman, on the other hand, was socialized into believing that for her to be considered virtuous she had confine herself to her home, and not go outside her home, sleep or live in other people's homes (Doniger and Smith, 1991:198).

According to Ayuub (2000), the socialization of South Asian Muslim women is such that she is conditioned to believe in the finality of the institution of marriage, even in the light of extreme difficulties, and that there could never be any compensation for the shame she would bring to her family if she walked out of her husband and her marital home. This conviction remains, despite the provision in the Quran that women had the right to divorce their husbands (Ayuub, 2000; Rahim, 2000).

And, just as the South Asian woman's confinement to the private space, her home, may be a means to control her mobility and identity (Massey, 1994), the use of violence can be a means to reinforce this control. Although the role of religion, culture and patriarchy cannot be underplayed in the incidence of wife abuse, the spatial aspects need investigating, especially in the context of what determines a woman's usage, access and mobility in space.

CREATION OF SAFE SPACES AND *RAKSHA*, INC.[4]

There have been increased efforts in the last two decades by a select few to provide refuge and support to abused South Asian immigrant women. In the 1980s, following concerns about the neglect of immigrant South Asian women's problems by mainstream agencies and feminist organizations, women from the community began to

[4] Information on *Raksha* is mainly derived from the interviews conducted by the author of the *Raksha* staff.

organize to form a new type of organization designed exclusively for the needs of abused South Asian women. The first of its kind was *Manavi*, which was founded in New Jersey in 1985 (Dasgupta, 2000). In 1989, South Asian women in Washington DC, who were earlier working in mainstream agencies, formed *Asha* to purvey to the specific needs of the abused women in this community (Preisser, 1999). In San Francisco and the adjoining Bay area, *Maitri* was established in 1991 under the aegis of the Asian Woman's Shelter, a pan-Asian organization (Bannerjee, 2000).

According to Abraham (1995), the battered women's movement in the United States and the United Kingdom, and the women's movement in South Asia were two movements that set the tone for the development of *Manavi, Asha, Maitri* and other South Asian Women's Organizations (SAWOs) in the US. At the same time, the establishment of these organizations was an element of a social movement that was sweeping through the United States in the late eighties and early nineties. *Raksha* was one such organization that evolved as part of these movements.

Raksha Incorporated is a Georgia-based non-profit organization located in Atlanta. Basically a support and referral network, it was established in 1995 through the organizing efforts of a few women of Asian Indian origin to cater to various issues faced by the South Asian community in Atlanta.

In mid-nineties, the founders of *Raksha* identified the lack of an organization in Atlanta and Georgia that catered to the needs of South Asian immigrants. Though there was no concrete evidence to depict that this community had needs similar to their counterparts in New Jersey, Chicago and other American cities, there was an intuitive feeling amongst them that there was an extant void that needed to be filled. What they were certain about was that mainstream agencies were not giving attention to the South Asian diaspora. What they were also certain about was that there were growing incidences of domestic violence in the community, and that these were largely unseen,

unheard and unattended. Thus, *Raksha* was incorporated as a non-profit organization and it started off as a help line attended intermittently by volunteers. There was no office space and little funds. While there were some people within the community who helped them set up, the rest of the community looked upon *Raksha* as a temporary whimsical project of a few young women who wanted to bide their time until they got married[5]. However, the lack of support by the community and the lack of funds did not deter *Raksha,* and it got its first major funding in 1997 and a space for their office. Proving that they were here to stay, the workers at *Raksha* began to establish their credibility, within the community and outside. Much of their work has been in the area of wife abuse, and issues related to it. *Raksha* today has two full time employees and two part time employees in addition to a well-coordinated and organized team of volunteers.

Raksha is dependent on federal, state and institutional grants for funds. They also conduct annual fund-raisers to generate additional funds. Although individual members of the South Asian community contribute monetary donations, the community at large does not contribute any money to the organization.

Raksha's initial aim was to cater to the problems faced by South Asians in general. However, as they had expected, most of their calls were from women seeking relief in situations of domestic abuse. Over the last seven years violence against women has become the major focus of their agenda. Further, their work in the field of wife abuse is their only funded project (*Raksha* web page, 2002).

Raksha's modus operandi begins with the establishment of initial contact with most of its clients over phone (nowadays, many abused women are establishing first contact by email, as well). When an abused woman first calls *Raksha*, the Caseworker prepares an 'intake', wherein she writes down the information that the abused woman is willing to give at that point. Such information includes a few demographics (name, age,

[5] Interview with Aparna Bhattacharya

etc.), her current county of residence, her immigration status, history of abuse, information about her husband, children, telephone numbers, times when safe to call, etc. Often, they are unable to get all the information in one call. It takes them time to build a certain level of confidence before the woman feels secure enough to divulge information about herself and her personal and intimate life. In order to make the woman aware of her rights, she is read to and explained her rights and responsibilities as a client, a policy statement on confidentiality, and on her first visit to *Raksha*, she is required to sign these documents and a liability form.

The services that *Raksha* offers abused women include crisis intervention, advocacy, support, transportation, interpretation, translation, referral to shelters, legal clinics, medical services, English speaking classes, and career services. However, their functions are not limited to their clients. The other responsibilities that *Raksha* has undertaken encompass the education and cultural sensitization (vis-à-vis South Asian immigrants) of shelters, advocates, law enforcement and mainstream agencies. They also spearhead awareness workshops on matters of social concern at (what they call) the fortnightly '*Masala Chai* (Spiced Tea) houses'. The discussions at these workshops, which mainly target South Asian immigrants and Americans of South Asian origin, look beyond the issues of wife abuse and violence against women, delving into the various factors that affect the South Asian immigrant community in general and the women in particular, searching for areas in need of resources and intervention.

Accommodation or shelter is one of the things that a woman requires when she decides to leave her home and abusive husband. Depending on their assessment of the woman (whether she is in a crisis, vulnerable, stable, safe or thriving stage[6]), *Raksha* makes arrangements for her to be accommodated at a shelter. Most of the time,

[6] Raksha's client assessment/ outcome matrix (based on what was developed by the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST), Los Angeles, CA).

however, they look for friends or relatives with whom the woman can stay until alternate arrangements are made. *Raksha* doesn't have a shelter of its own. However, it has contacts with different shelters around the city that have provision for emergency accommodation. One such shelter is the International Woman's house, which *Raksha* had helped build. This shelter basically caters to the shelter needs of battered immigrant and refugee women.

In such a scenario (presented in the above pages), it becomes important to find out what an abused South Asian immigrant wife perceives home to be; whether she considered home to be safe; whether there were other places/ spaces where she felt safe; what her experiences of social and spatial isolation are; and, whether these experiences influence her concepts of home and safe space.

Studying the experiences of South Asian immigrant women in situations of domestic violence would, therefore, be a very important contribution to the literature on domestic violence within social science, in general, and in the discipline of geography, in particular. A study of the spatial aspects, especially that of home and of safe space, shall provide significant clues to understanding why the experiences, reactions and responses of abused South Asian immigrant women are different from that of the mainstream American women.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research focuses on two issues, notions of home and the creation of safe spaces. And, accordingly, two sets of questions are posed:

1. Do abused immigrant women consider 'home' to be a safe space? What are their notions about home? Do their experiences of isolation have an impact on their notions of home?

2. How do safe spaces like Raksha develop? What role do they play as 'safe spaces'? How significant are they in terms of providing an alternate to home for immigrant women?

To address the above questions, I first conducted a survey of abused South Asian immigrant women, who were clients of Raksha and then conducted in-depth interviews with the Raksha staff.

THE SURVEY AND ITS ADMINISTRATION

I designed a self-administered questionnaire, which allowed the participants to retain their anonymity, and be assured of the confidentiality of the information they were giving. Since there was a concern that there were some women who had limited levels of proficiency in English, I also translated some of the questionnaires into Hindi. The survey questionnaire (attached as Appendix A) was six pages long and had a cover letter attached to it. The cover letter (attached as Appendix B) was what the Institutional Review Board refers to as an 'implied consent'. The purpose of the cover letter was to introduce and briefly explain my research, request participation of *Raksha* clients, and to

stress the anonymity and confidentiality of their participation in the research process. The survey questionnaire was divided into four sections, the woman's background, period before the abuse, period after the abuse and after Raksha. The questions in the sections, periods before and after abuse asked the woman about their mobility, communication levels, and the places they considered as safe.

I visited the women during their support group sessions, spoke to them about my research, answered their questions and passed out the surveys amongst them. I was relying on the strategy of group administration (Fowler, 1993) to educe higher rates of response. I considered the opportunity of gaining access to the support group as extremely fortunate as these sessions at Raksha are reputed to be fiercely confidential and they are accessible only to the domestic violence Case Manager of Raksha and their part-time counselor. I attended two support group sessions on different days. From my past conversations with the staff of Raksha, I had gathered that each support group sessions had about 6 to 8 women. In order to access more women during a short time span, I decided to mail the questionnaires to women who chose not to attend the support group sessions. Because of client confidentiality rights, Raksha directly mailed the surveys to some of the women.

On my first visit I handed out six questionnaires. Raksha sent out three by mail. And, on my second visit I handed out another three surveys. Of the twelve questionnaires passed out, I received back seven that were filled out. Five of the women filled out the survey at the Raksha office and two mailed the survey to me. All of the women filled out English questionnaires.

INTERVIEWS WITH THE STAFF OF RAKSHA

In addition to conducting the surveys, I also interviewed key members of the staff of *Raksha*. In between the two support sessions I attended, I was able to interview

Aparna Bhattacharya, the Executive Director, and Rita Patel, the domestic violence Case Manager of *Raksha*. The third interview was with Aqsa Farooqui, a Case Worker at *Raksha*. Aparna who is a lawyer by profession was one of the founders of *Raksha*. Although she handled individual cases at the beginning, her current responsibility as Executive Director entails advocacy, raising funds and grants for the organization, general management, organizing workshops for law enforcement agencies, etc.

Rita was one of the first volunteers to work with *Raksha*. She joined *Raksha* in June 2000 as a full time Domestic Violence Case Manager. Her basic responsibility is the supervision of the violence against women program, which entails supervising two Case Workers, attending to client phone calls, meeting clients, providing referral services, advocacy, counseling, and facilitating the support groups.

Aqsa is a Case Worker at *Raksha*. Her responsibilities entail attending to client phone calls, providing support, helping with translation and interpretation, and accompanying clients to court. Her responsibilities also include overseeing employment requirements and opportunities for the abused women.

These interviews were conducted in the office of *Raksha* on three different days. All the interviews were semi-structured and consisted of open-ended questions (lists of the guiding questions are attached as Appendix C). The purpose of conducting these interviews was to elicit information that was unlikely to emerge from a survey (given its obvious limitations). The objective was to be able to get the staff to draw from their respective experiences of having worked with abused women, and having tackled varying issues related to situations in domestic violence in the South Asian immigrant community, and give me a more wider perspective on an abused South Asian immigrant woman's notions of home and safe space.

While the interviews with Aparna and Aqsa lasted for 45 and 30 minutes respectively, the interview with Rita lasted for about one hour and 15 minutes. All of

these interviews were conducted in English, and were audio taped. The interviews were subsequently transcribed, and the information was coded by assigning the data certain labels and then organized into meaningful categories, based on the themes around which the guiding interview questions had been designed (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

PROFILE OF THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS

In this section, I present the individual profile of each of the seven respondents. It is difficult to present a general profile of the women, as the profiles shall depict. These profiles not only depict the diverse backgrounds of each woman, but also touch upon the varying response to abuse, and a varying need for support. These sketches summarize their individual responses, and are essentially a prelude to the ensuing discussion in the next chapter.

Nazma[7]

Nazma is a 26-year-old Muslim woman from India. Educated up to the 12th grade, she spoke Urdu at home. She was the youngest of the survey participants, and one of the four women who filled out the questionnaire at *Raksha*. The timeline that Nazma presented through her survey responses suggested a lack of clarity, and raised related questions. She was married in 1997-98 in India (in Hyderabad), and she had lived in India with her husband for more than two years before immigrating. Since she had immigrated to the United States in 1996, one can presume that she had returned to India to be married, and had probably returned to the United States in 1999-2000. Her immigration to the United States, thus, was not related to her marriage.

Nazma considered herself to be very familiar with the United States at the time of immigration. Nazma was fairly conversant in English, and used to work in her home

[7] The surveys did not ask the women their names. All the names assigned to the respondents are fictitious.

country for a salary. Since she stayed in her home country (before coming to the United States) after her marriage, it is difficult to gauge whether she had worked before getting married, after, or at both times. This information could have provided vital knowledge about the level of her mobility before and after marriage, as also before and after the start of abuse.

Nazma's husband began abusing her within a year of their marriage. She was, thus, abused at home, in India, and at home, in the United States. Before the abuse began, Nazma used to visit her sister. She also communicated with her sister on a weekly basis. Yet, she said that she did not feel safe in her sister's home. She was also able to visit her friend(s) during this period, and this was the only place where she felt safe before the abuse began. As to why she found her friend's home to be safe, Nazma said,

> I can share my problems with my friends and learn a lot of things from them. They share their problems with me too. And, this makes me strong.

In addition to these two places, Nazma also paid visits to parks and mosques, but apparently she did not relate these two places with her personal safety. After the abuse began, Nazma stopped visiting her sister, but maintained her weekly contact with her sister during this period. Even though Nazma's father lived in the United States, she neither communicated with him nor did she visit him during the two periods under study. Though Nazma did not visit her mother, who apparently lived in India, during the two periods studied, she communicated with her on a monthly basis both before and after the abuse began. After the abuse started, Nazma still visited her friend (or friends), and continued to find her (their) home safe. It is thus, seen that Nazma's husband's abusive behavior curtailed her mobility. She was no longer able to access her sister's home, the park or the mosque, even if these were not places where she had felt safe.

Nazma's friend not only informed her about *Raksha*, but also accompanied her on her first visit to the office of *Raksha*. Though Nazma did not identify the reasons behind her decision to go to *Raksha*, she cites the need for support as her reason for continuing to go back to *Raksha*. She writes, "I share my problems (at *Raksha*), and this makes living in this world a little easier".

Anamika

Anamika did not answer any of the questions that were related in any way to her identity. She did not write her years of birth, marriage or immigration, her country of origin, her education, religion or language. At the same time, she was one of the few who gave some very significant and cohesive information about her notions of safe spaces.

Anamika was married 8 years ago, putting her year of marriage as 1994. She immigrated in the same year having stayed for less than a month with her husband in her home country. Anamika was very conversant with English and used it at least once a day, and had worked in her home country for a salary. Apart from relatives and friends, she did not know anyone else in the United States. She did consider herself to be familiar with the way of life in the United States before coming here.

Anamika's responses indicate that her marriage was divided into a period when she faced non-physical form of abuse, and a period when she faced physical abuse. She has used the framework of the dichotomy of 'before the abuse began' and 'after the abuse began' that was built into the survey, to put forth the responses according to the dichotomy that existed in her mind. At the same time she said that her husband began to abuse her within 1-2 years of their marriage. It is, therefore, possible that (perhaps) she did not consider the non-physical abuse (that she alludes to in her responses) as abuse,

and, thus, consented that the division of her married life was in accordance to the one the survey suggested.

During the period preceding abuse, Anamika was able to visit only her neighbor's home. Although she had friends and some relatives in the US, she did not (or, could not) visit them. It is possible that these familiar people lived in different states or far from Atlanta, thereby, constraining the possibility of visits. But it is also possible that her husband did not allow her to visit them. The reason she could not visit her parents or family could be because they lived in her home country, thus, disallowing the chances of visiting them. She was able to communicate with her parents and relatives once a month, while she could keep in touch with her friends on a weekly basis. During the period preceding abuse, Anamika, has very briskly informed that she found 'nowhere' to be a safe space, as her visits to any and all places were time-bound and strictly monitored by her husband. She, however, adds that she only felt safe when they were away from home on vacation.

Once her husband began to abuse her, Anamika found herself completely isolated. She could no longer visit her neighbors, and her contact with her parents, relatives and friends came to a complete stop. Occasionally relatives would call her. However, it was during this period that she was allowed (by her husband) to go to the neighborhood park with her children. Abused and isolated, Anamika sought solace in the anonymity of the park, sometimes more than once a day. It was here that she felt safe.

Anamika left her husband before the intervention of *Raksha*. She learnt about *Raksha* from the shelter in which she had sought refuge from her abusive husband. Her main reasons for contacting *Raksha* were to look for accommodation and for assistance in retaining her immigrant status. Even at the time of the survey she had issues pertaining to immigration, which *Raksha* helped her to tackle. She continues to return to *Raksha* for help in searching for accommodation, for support, contacts and resources.

Noor

Noor was the oldest survey participant. A Muslim, she was born in Bihar, India in 1943. She was married in 1967 in Karachi in Pakistan. Noor was born in pre-independence and pre-partition India. It is possible that she migrated to Pakistan following independence and the partition of India, so her country of origin is (for all practical purposes) Pakistan. However, it is also possible that she grew up in India but was married to a Pakistani. So, her country of origin is not clear from her reply to the question on her place and country of birth. Her replies indicated that she belonged to a wealthy family (she wrote that she had visited the United States before). She has indicated that her education was 'college'. I interpret this as up to 11th or 12th grade, as people from the Indian sub continent tend to say that they are 'graduates' if they have completed their Bachelors Degree. Noor was not very proficient in English and used the language once a week. Noor's sister, brother, relatives and friends all lived in the United States. Before her immigration to the United States in 1994, Noor had visited the country, and she considered herself to be very familiar with the ways of life in this country.

Before her husband began to abuse her, Noor used to visit her parents' home, and felt safe there. Noor was also able to communicate with her parents, even though it was only once a year. Within the first two years of their marriage, Noor's husband began to abuse her. After the abuse began, Noor was still able to visit her parents and communicate with them more often than she did before. And, unlike the period before abuse, Noor was also able to visit her sister's home. She was also able to communicate with her sister, brother, relatives, friends and neighbors monthly. And she found her parents' and her sister's homes to be safe. For Noor it was the support that she got from her family that went into defining a safe space. She writes, "(I felt safe there) because they were my family and they supported me".

Noor learnt about *Raksha* from her son, who took her to the organization the first time, and sometimes still takes her there. Noor's reasons for contacting *Raksha* were more for support and solidarity than for the other tangible resources offered by *Raksha*. She cites her reason for visiting *Raksha* as, "… to volunteer and help other women".

Kaveri

Kaveri was a 34-year-old Hindu woman from India. She spoke Marathi at home and used English at least once a day. She was married in 1991 in India, and immigrated to the United States in 1993. She lived in India with her husband for less than 1 year of her marriage before immigrating. The two-year gap between her years of marriage and immigration suggest that her husband immigrated first and that she followed him later. She has completed her High School, and worked in her home country for a salary. Since she had lived in India after marriage, it is difficult to ascertain whether she had worked before or after marriage, or during both periods. It is also possible that she worked in India during the period that her husband was in the United States.

On her arrival in the United States, Kaveri did not consider herself to be very familiar with way of life in the country. So for her, immigrating to the United States was coming to a place with a completely different culture with which she had little or no acquaintance. Kaveri's brother lived in the United States, as did some of her distant relatives. Kaveri and her husband lived together in India for 6-12 months following their marriage (before he, presumably, immigrated alone), and within the first 3-4 months of marriage he started abusing her.

Before her husband began to abuse her, Kaveri's mobility was constrained. She was able to visit only her sister and that too, occasionally. She considered her sister's place to be safe. She was able to communicate with her parents and sister on a weekly basis, with her brother once a month and with her neighbors more than once a month. In

addition to these, she had to keep in touch with her husband's family on a daily basis. Although Kaveri did not visit her parents' home, or malls or parks, she writes that these were the places where she felt safe, because, "My husband would not abuse me in these places".

This statement by Kaveri puts several questions in one's mind. The first doubt that came to mind was whether she had misinterpreted the reference to 'period before abuse'. But, Kaveri appeared to be an intelligent woman, and it didn't seem likely that she would make mistakes when relating her trauma or its timeline. But her statement makes one think that perhaps there was no such 'period before abuse' for her. It is possible that the presumed division of periods in the survey made her make a mental division, where perhaps there was none. It is possible that even though her husband had not abused her physically initially, there was enough non-physical abuse in the first few months after marriage, for her to make the above statement. It is also possible that she is differentiating between the two periods on the basis of the type of abuse. But given the limits of a survey, these questions shall remain unanswered.

Once her abuse began, Kaveri's already constrained mobility was further affected. She was no longer able to visit her family. This was, perhaps, because she had immigrated to the United States, by then. The only places she could go to (during this period) were her children's school and her workplace. And, not surprisingly, these were the two places where she felt safe. Her degree of communicating with her family had been adversely affected during the period after the abuse began. She contacted her mother once a month (her father had probably deceased, as she writes 'not applicable' for him). She was able to communicate with her siblings at a less frequent rate (more than once a year). And, she still had to communicate with her husband's family, although this had also decreased from once a day to once a week.

Kaveri learnt about *Raksha* from her brother who lives in another US State. Although he gave her the phone number of the organization, her first visit to *Raksha* came about as she says,

> I met Aparna (the Executive Director of *Raksha*) at the airport while escaping to (names a state) with my brother.

This statement of Kaveri also leads one to wonder about the role of her brother. By extending his support to his sister, was he fulfilling a familial and social duty, which required him to take care of his sister? Also, Kaveri's meeting with Aparna at the airport does not seem a mere coincidence. Was it possible that Kaveri's brother set up the meeting?

Unlike the other women in this sample, Kaveri needed more of *Raksha's* resources. She sought legal help from *Raksha* to divorce her husband and retain custody of her children and help in looking for a place to live. Her other reasons for contacting *Raksha* were that she did not know anyone else who could extend similar help, that they were located close to where she lived, and also because she felt that other (non-South Asian) organizations were culturally dissimilar. Kaveri continues to return to *Raksha*. She still requires legal help because her husband continues to threaten her, and the support.

Gopa

Gopa was a 40-year-old Hindu woman from Calcutta in India. In this sample she stands out as the most educated woman, having completed her Masters degree. Gopa spoke Bengali at home and is very proficient in English. When she lived in India, she worked for a salary. Gopa's parents and sister also lived in the United States, which indicates that they probably immigrated together in 1993. She was one of the two

women in this sample whose marriage followed their immigration. Gopa has indicated that she was familiar with the ways of life in the United States when she immigrated.

Gopa was married soon after her immigration to the United States in 1993. Gopa's husband began abusing her immediately after their marriage. Although Gopa did not have a 'period before the abuse began' in her married life, she has answered the questions pertaining to the period before the abuse began, and to those concerning the period after the abuse began. Since questions in both these sections were the same, Gopa differentiated between these two periods in a way other than that mentioned in the survey, as her responses in both the sections are different.

Before her husband began to abuse her, Gopa was able to visit her sister's home, her friend's home, malls and cinemas. She found her parents', sister's and friend's homes to be safe. During this period she communicated with her sister and friend on a daily basis. In the time following the start of abuse, Gopa's movement outside her home was restricted to the cinema and parks. For Gopa, her sister's and friend's home still represented safety, so did the malls, although she no longer visited them frequently. Although she visited the cinema and the parks very often, she did not consider these places outside of her home. It is possible that it was because her husband accompanied her to these places. It is also possible that because people in these public places were strangers, they did not appear to her as sources of help.

After she began to be abused by her husband, while Gopa continued to keep in touch with her sister every day, she could no longer communicate with her friend. On the other hand she began to communicate with her parents, once a week, something she was not doing before the start of abuse.

Gopa learnt about *Raksha* from her friend. She drove there by herself. Since she had immigrated before her marriage, and because (perhaps) she had her family here, she did not require any of the 'tangible' resources *Raksha* offered. Her main reason for

contacting *Raksha* was for support. She continues to return back to *Raksha* to attend the support group sessions, and for support.

Ameena

Ameena was a 32-year-old Muslim woman from Pakistan. She spoke in Urdu at home and in English at least once a day. Ameena had attained her Bachelor's degree and had also worked in her home country for a living. She was the other woman in this sample whose immigration preceded her marriage. Ameena immigrated in 1995, and was married the same year. Her sister was her only relative living in the United States. At the time of immigrating Ameena considered herself to be very familiar about the United States and the way of life in this country.

Ameena's husband began to abuse her within 1-2 years of their marriage. However, the period of abuse was preceded by regular arguments initiated by her husband. And during this time she had sought refuge in her sister's home during her frequent visits to the latter's home and during her daily contacts with her. She felt safe at her sister's home. Ameena gave her reason for feeling safe at her sister's place as, "... being at my sister's place took me away from my argumentative husband".

Once her husband began to abuse her, Ameena's visits to her sister's place came to a complete stop. She could no longer visit her. But she maintained her daily contact with her. And, she still considered her sister's home a safe place. During this period, however, Ameena had started working, so she was able to get out of her home and go to her workplace, though she did not consider it to be a safe place.

Ameena learnt about *Raksha* from the newspaper, and went there with a family member, which I suppose must be her sister (as she writes that her sister was her only relative in the United States). On her visits to *Raksha*, she drives there by her self. Ameena's main purpose of contacting *Raksha* was to seek legal help in obtaining a

divorce from her husband. And, the day she filled out the survey was her first time at the support group session.

Runa

Runa was a 36-year-old Muslim woman from Bangladesh. Runa spoke Bengali and English at home. She never worked for a salary back home in Bangladesh. She was married in 1982 when she was a mere 16 years of age. Within a year of their marriage, Runa's husband had begun to abuse her. Despite the abuse, Runa managed to obtain her Bachelors' degree. She immigrated seventeen years after marriage in 1999. When she came to the United States, Runa considered herself to be very familiar with the US culture and the way of living here. Runa's sister was her only relative living in the United States.

Runa's responses to the survey did not differentiate between the periods before and after abuse began, but instead differentiated between the period that she was in Bangladesh and in the United States. Though she does not clearly say so, her replies, specifically in relation to the places of safety, indicate that she probably had this differentiation in mind, rather than a dichotomy between the 'before the abuse began' and 'after the abuse began' periods. It is important to keep this in mind while going through her survey responses below.

Before Runa's husband began to abuse her, she was able to visit her parents' home and cinemas. She was able to keep in touch with her mother every week, and with her friends at least once a month. She considered her parents' and her friends' homes to be safe. Runa says,

> My parents gave me safety; my friends gave me mental support. This made me feel better.

After the abuse began, Runa was no longer able to visit her parents at their home, and she was able to contact her only once a year. The cinema was another place that Runa was able to visit during this period, though she did not consider it to be a safe place, which could be probably because her husband accompanied her to this place, or possibly because the presence of strangers deterred her from seeking help. Although she was able to visit her friend, she could not communicate with her. Yet she found her friend's place to be safe. To Runa, her friend's support was very important. She says, "My friend supported me a lot, and brought me to *Raksha*".

Runa's friend not only informed her about *Raksha*, but also took her there the first time. Runa's main reason for seeking refuge at *Raksha* was because of the help that she needed on issues pertaining to her immigration. She continues to go back to *Raksha* because of help required on immigration, her employment and support. A volunteer drives Runa to *Raksha* for this.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

From the presentation of the profile of each woman in the previous chapter, it becomes very apparent that each abused woman is strikingly different. Although they originate from the same geographical region, their backgrounds are highly diverse, right from their ages and countries of origin to their religion, language and educational background. Even their responses to spousal abuse varied. While some of them had put up with up the abuse for years, others had not. While some had sought the help of friends and family to end the relationship, others had directly sought the help of battered women's shelters.

Despite all these differences, there were some aspects that were common to these abused South Asian immigrant women. The main three things that was common to all these women was their histories of abuse, their courage and decision to end their victimization, and their seeking refuge at *Raksha*.

This chapter seeks to discuss these differences and commonalities amongst these women, and how these have influenced or impacted their (the women's) understandings of home, safe space, public and private spaces. The discussion of the women's responses is interspersed with insights from the interviews with the staff of *Raksha*.

CONCEPT OF HOME AND SAFE SPACE

I would like to begin this discussion with a caveat that it has been presupposed that the women who responded to the survey associated their parental home with the

conventional connotations of home, that it was a refuge, a haven and safe. The reason this presupposition has been made is because it was beyond the scope of the survey and this research to ask specific questions relating to each woman's understanding of home in connection with where she had lived with her parents.

It is a commonly held belief in South Asia that part of a woman's socialization includes her defining and understanding home, as a physical space, to encompass her parental home, before marriage, and her husband's home thereafter[8]. According to *Raksha*, many of the women during individual counseling sessions talked about how happy and safe they were in their parental homes in their home countries[9]. And, almost in consonance with that, many (not all) of the women I surveyed considered their parents' homes to be a safe place. This was more specific to the period before the abuse began. Of the women who identified their parents' home as safe, not all of them visited (or were able to visit) their parents during the period 'before abuse'. However, most of them were able to maintain contact with their parents. This could be because some of these women did not have their parents in the United States or in the place they lived before immigrating. After the onset of abuse, only one woman found her parents' home to be safe, and she was able to visit them and communicate with them once a month, though it is significant to note that this was when she was in her home country.

Coming to the home the women shared with their husbands, it is pertinent to mention here that among other answer options, "the home you shared with your husband" was one option for answering the question "where do you feel safe". Needless to say, none of the respondents checked off this answer in either time period. This is significant inasmuch that the home each woman shared with her husband, so often referred to as a refuge and as a safe haven was what she did not consider as safe,

[8] This is related from my experience of growing up and socialization in India.
[9] Interview with Aqsa Farooqui.

either before or after the abuse. This is all the more significant for a South Asian immigrant woman in that this went against her social upbringing whereby she had been conditioned to believe that her husband's home was a safe space.

For some of the women, like Noor, Kaveri, Gopa, and Runa, their abilities to visit their parents' home before the start of abuse, was possible probably because they lived in the same city (and country) as their parents. Some of these women were not able to communicate as often with their parents, but this did not deter their feelings of safeness associated with their parental home. In the case of Gopa, she considered her parents' home to be safe even though she neither communicated with nor visited them. However, once their husbands began to abuse them, the women (except for Noor) no longer considered their parental home safe. Though Kaveri and Runa maintained their previous levels of communication with their parents, they were not able to visit them. Although Gopa began communicating with her parents and visiting them, she no longer found her parents' home to be safe.

Although some women found their parents' home to be safe prior to the abuse, returning back to their home countries was an option that they did not want to consider. According to the *Raksha* staff[10], the women who had separated (legally, or otherwise) from their abusive husbands did not opt to return to their home countries. Given the socio-cultural set-up in her home country, to live in the home (her parents') she had once considered safe could be a very difficult social proposition for a woman separated from her husband. According to Aparna, many of the women who have considered going back (but eventually did not) feel,

> … the whole idea of being a divorced woman in India or Pakistan or Bangladesh … many of them feel that they will be tortured just as much; they'll be treated very differently. Sometimes they know that they'll be harassed, and then there's the pride. Of course, you have had this big lavish wedding and etc. And they know that a lot of people will blame them for the failure of the marriage. They

[10] Interviews with Aparna Bhattacharya, Rita Patel and Aqsa Farooqui.

> also think that people like them will be more targets, because they are divorced, for other harassment or sexual harassment or sexual overtures.

Sometimes, even if the woman wants to, and decides to go back to her home country, she is not always welcome. Aparna reminiscences,

> There have been a couple of women who have wanted to go back, but their parents did not want them back. I remember one particular case in the beginning when the woman's parents called up and said, "You can now take her. She is no longer our daughter".

According to the surveys, none of the women who had sought relief at Raksha had asked for assistance to return to their home countries. What is particularly interesting about this is that the parental home deemed to be safe by most women before marriage and before the start of abuse, began to be perceived as unsafe after they had left their abusive husbands. For some the abuse itself had rendered the parental home unsafe. This could have been because of a host of culture-specific reasons, because of which a woman's parents were asking her to 'adjust' with her husband or make adjustments to her lifestyle, or were expressing their inability to intervene in what they thought was a personal matter or they were apprehensive that following their intervention, their son-in-law would discard or divorce their daughter (which would in itself be stigmatizing). It is thus, seen that an ostensibly "neutral" space that was once considered safe by a South Asian woman can undergo change following abuse.

SOCIAL AND SPATIAL ISOLATION

As Spain (1992) had pointed out, spatial isolation (or segregation) restricted an abused woman's access to information and knowledge, knowledge about her rights in the United States, about the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS), and other rules in the country, information that would assist in releasing her from the clutches of

her abusive husband. According to R*aksha*[11], about 70% of their clients have issues pertaining to immigration, and more often, than not, this is what has compelled them to stay in a space they do not consider safe. Rita corroborates,

> … they don't know what their immigration status is any more, because their husbands never told them. They have had their green card taken away, and quite a few have slid into the undocumented status, which makes it very difficult for them to get a bank account or a credit card or a driver's license or getting a job…

Because she is ignorant about the laws in the United States and the way the state and its machinery work, an abused South Asian immigrant woman often lives in an added sense of fear and dread in an already unsafe space. In reference to this fear, Aparna says,

> Many women are scared when they call us. They want to know that they are not alone, and what resources are available. Some are scared because they have been told by their batterers that their deportation; their immigration status will be affected. They are scared because they don't know who we know, and if we are going to tell their batterers. Because of the system they have been exposed to, they fear that they could tell someone something, and it could come back later to haunt them.

It is important to analyze this fear the women have of deportation. As discussed in the previous section, for these women, being deported means having to go back to their respective countries with the much-stigmatized legacy of a broken marriage, the blame of which would be placed on their shoulders. To be deported would mean going back to homes that they no longer perceived as safe. Some have also been told by their abusers that the INS would confiscate their green cards if they (the wives) were to leave (their husbands). Thus, by telling (or threatening) their wives (who, because of deliberate isolation have no access to the rules regarding immigration) that the latter would be deported or that their green cards would either be confiscated or would lose their validity,

[11] Interview with Rita Patel.

abusive husbands use immigration status as a significant tool to exercise control over their wives.

This lack of access to knowledge and information, often festered by fear, also creates an intuitive sense of distrust within these women. Aqsa says,

> When they (the abused women) call the first time, they don't trust *Raksha*. They don't give me their last names. They don't want me to call them. They say, "I'll call you". It's because they are so fearful in their own homes.

The feeling of insecurity and fear within her home is often heightened by their abuser's deliberate efforts to isolate his wife from familiar people (as is evident from some of the women having to discontinue or decrease their communications and contacts) and places, and also from the new place and the culture she lived in, and, deny her access to knowledge. Aparna says,

> He doesn't let her talk with anybody; he isolates her in her home. He won't let her call her family; he checks on her constantly, such that she feels that she is a prisoner in her own home.

It is pertinent to mention Kaveri's experience here. She specifies that her first visit to Raksha materialized when she met Aparna at the airport when she was 'escaping' with her brother to where he lived (in the United States). The use of the word 'escape' by itself signifies that she considered the place where she had lived with her husband, a prison, not a home. Further Kaveri's experience also brings up the role of family in alleviating situations of abuse. That Kaveri's brother intervened by helping her to escape from her abuser's home indicates that perhaps she was an exception to isolation. At the same time it also raises the questions of why she did not go with her brother, and why she chose to stay back in Atlanta. It is possible that her brother's socialization deemed it necessary for him to 'rescue' her. At the same time, it is possible that he set up his sister's meeting with Aparna at the airport, so that his sister could take

Raksha's help in making up with her husband, because he has been socialized to believe that a woman's place after marriage was with her husband.

Social isolation of the abused women can be gauged by analyzing the changes in the women's communication and mobility patterns outside their homes. During the period before the abuse began, the women were able to maintain contact with parents, siblings, relatives, friends and neighbors. The intermittency of these communications varied between once a year and once a day. The start of abuse in these women's lives changed the frequency of their communications with family and friends. While one woman was not able contact anybody after the abuse started (with the exception of having relatives call her), for another her frequency of keeping in touch (both, with respect to number of people and number of times) went up. She was able to communicate with more people and more often than she did before. For others there were few changes. One could no longer communicate with her mother. And one of the women who, earlier, had not been communicating with her mother now communicated with her on a weekly basis. For one woman there was no change in her communication patterns. For others the frequency of communicating decreased. Although it is possible that none of these women in their communications with family and friends actually spoke or referred to the abuse, it is important to realize that communicating (mainly over telephone) essentially helps to combat social isolation, if not spatial isolation.

Another challenge abused South Asian immigrant women face is that of transportation. Most American cities are very auto-dependent, and this takes its toll on the immigrant woman, whose husband refuses to let her take driving lessons. Or if she knows how to drive, he doesn't let her go and get a license, or simply doesn't give her access to the family car. This lack of access to mobility also serves to spatially isolate her. So far their mobility was concerned, I found that before the start of abuse, the women were able to visit their sister's, friend's, and their neighbor's home, in addition to

visiting their parents. The women also visited parks, malls, their places of worship and the cinema. After their husbands began to abuse them, some women were still able to visit the same places as before the abuse. But, for others, their places of visit had changed. Some women visited more places than before, while some went to fewer places than before. Anamika, for instance was not able to visit anyone, but she was allowed to go to parks. The only places that Kaveri could visit were her workplace and her children's school. For some women, like Anamika and Runa, the start of abuse implied a simultaneous social and spatial isolation: their contact with other people and their mobility having been drastically reduced (nearing zero for Anamika). In the case of other women, Noor, for instance, was able to communicate more, and Gopa, was able to regain her communication with her parents.

As can be seen from the above analysis, it is clear that experiences of isolation have been different for each woman, and as Abraham (2000) had found in her studies, these experiences tend to accentuate an immigrant woman's vulnerability to more abuse. It is also seen that abusive husbands use 'immigration status' as a handy tool to continue to abuse and exert control over their wives. It can thus, be concluded that an abused South Asian immigrant woman's experience of social and spatial isolation in a foreign country, and her immigration status (and, her lack of access to knowledge and related information about it) significantly affect her perspective on home and its safeness.

PUBLIC SPACE AS SAFE AND ALTERNATE SAFE SPACES

For a South Asian woman, safe space has conventionally been the home and domestic space and public place for her has almost always been associated as being unsafe (Rose, 1993; Doniger and Smith, 1991). The discussion in the previous section, however, concluded that she did not consider home to be a safe space. But, women did

find other places to be safe. During the period preceding the start of abuse, women found their friend's and sister's home, malls, their workplaces and parks, in addition to their parents' home, to be safe. One of the respondents considered 'no where' to be safe. This respondent (Anamika) justified her reply by saying,

> At home, I was under his supervision. If I went anywhere, there was a time limit. I was always looking at my watch to go back.

Anamika, however, adds that vacation times away from home were times when she felt safe. 'Away from home' were safe times for Anamika, thus, clearly showing that the spatiality of her home evoked intense fearful emotions and feelings. So, even if she were on vacation with her abuser, just being outside home (where, perhaps her husband could not abuse her) gave her a sense of security and some relief.

Once the abuse began, there was a decrease in the number of places, other than home, that women perceived to be safe. Women still found their friend's home, sister's homes, malls, their workplaces, parks and their children's school, in addition to their parents' home, to be safe. Anamika who found parks to be a place of safety and refuge says,

> I was allowed to take my children to the neighborhood park. I went everyday. Sometimes even, twice a day. He knew where I was, but he didn't bother to come, except when he needed me. Children enjoyed the park, and it gave me time to think.

Anamika points out the relevance of her being outside her home that made her feel safe. Her feeling of safety was also associated with her husband's 'permission' to go out of the house, because she knew that with this allowance, her chances of being subject to more abuse were slim. Malls and parks are public places, conventional places of danger for a woman, especially for a South Asian woman, and it was here that many of the abused women sought and got safety and refuge. Perhaps, it was because these

public places offered them a kind of release from their captivities at home, and above all, as Gopa puts it so precisely, “I was away from everything related to my marriage”.

The abused South Asian immigrant women also felt safe in the homes of other people, like that of their sister’s and friend’s places, which, conventionally, would not be viewed ‘home’. For many of these women their siblings and friends have doubled as reliable supports. Their homes were probably the only places in which they received sympathy, and were not asked to ‘adjust’ with their abusive husbands. Away from their homelands and their familial support systems, at least in theory, siblings and friends became the surrogate and sole support systems for these women.

Immigration has also helped abused South Asian women to find other places of safety. The cases of Noor and Runa are particularly good examples. Both of them had lived with their abusive husbands in their home countries for a considerably long time (Noor had lived for 27 years, and Runa had lived for 17 years). Their families had acted as safety nets, supporting them, sympathizing with them, and perhaps never encouraging them to stand up to him or leave him. The abuse persisted in their respective marriages after they immigrated to the United States. This time neither had their families for support. After coming to the United States, Noor’s son encouraged her to take the courageous step of leaving her husband, helped her to get in touch with *Raksha*, and transported her there. Runa sought refuge in *Raksha* with the help of a friend, and subsequently walked out of her husband’s home.

The stories of Noor and Runa show that their immigration to the United States worked as some kind of a catalyst in helping them to take the decision of leaving their abusive husbands. Being away from their family and social taboos of their homelands was also a significant factor. That immigration played a significant role is also evident from the fact that Noor’s son (who may have witnessed his mother’s victimization in their home country) encouraged her to leave the home she had never been safe in, here in

the United States. The roles of Noor's son and Kaveri's brother also point to the conventional 'duties' of brothers and sons in South Asia. Both are socialized into being duty bound to 'take care' of their sisters and their mothers (in old age). It is possible that the socialization of Noor's son and Kaveri's brother obliged them to 'take care' of their mother and sister respectively. It is also possible that the two men's immigration motivated them to encourage their sister and mother to leave their respective abusive husbands, something, which Noor's son could possibly have done in his country, but couldn't.

It is, therefore, seen that in the absence of safeness and security at their home, abused South Asian immigrant women have looked for and found alternate spaces of safety in both, public and private places, places that she has been socialized to associate with danger. At the same time, it is interesting to note that they associate safety only with those public spaces that are open and lighted, like malls and parks, while they don't consider enclosed spaces like cinemas to be safe.

RAKSHA AS SAFE SPACE; *RAKSHA* AS HOME

When *Raksha* was being established, its objective was to be able to provide resources for the entire South Asian community and its individuals: resources for issues that mainstream American agencies were not addressing vis-à-vis immigrants. So, although Raksha started out as an organization for "South Asians in distress"[12], at the same time, they also expected to address issues of domestic violence in the diaspora (in Atlanta) going by the experiences of other South Asian Women's Organizations in the North East.

With its first funding, *Raksha* was able to rent office space. For *Raksha* and its (then) fledgling staff acquiring office space was a matter of very careful decision making

[12] Interview with Aparna Bhattacharya.

as to the location of the office. Aware that Atlanta's public transportation, MARTA, did not serve the entire metropolitan area, and aware that many of their clients would not have access to personal modes of transport, it was particularly important for them to be located where they could be accessible by MARTA. They also wanted to be located as centrally (for Atlanta) as possible to serve South Asian women in an approximate radius that touched most of the counties in which South Asians were residing. And, of course, also importantly they wanted the rent to fit within their tight budget. Their current location addressed these concerns: they are located within close access to the MARTA bus system and a MARTA rail way station, and are located within what is referred in Atlanta as Midtown.

When *Raksha* first established its help line, they were not very certain (though they were prepared) whether they would (and, if they did, what the volume would be) receive calls from victims of domestic violence. Much to their surprise, they were overwhelmed by the large number of distress calls (80% of all the calls) received from South Asian women in situations of domestic violence. The realization that there was indeed a need for their service, was what kept them going, especially when a year after they were established there was serious talk about closing down because of low funds and because some key members were leaving.

The women I surveyed were asked to identify their reasons for approaching *Raksha*. Their reasons for approaching *Raksha* varied from help required on immigration matters, legal help to obtain divorce, gain custody of children, acquire restraining orders against ex-husbands, etc., to help in looking for accommodation, and needing support in some form or the other. Some of the women also said that they had not known who else they could approach for help, and that *Raksha's* proximity to their place of residence made it easier for them to turn to the agency for help. One of the women also said that it

was because mainstream American agencies were culturally so dissimilar, that she had chosen to go to *Raksha*.

When asked why they continued to return to *Raksha* (these women were no longer in situations of abuse, having left their abusive husbands), most of the women asserted that they came back for support, few still needed help on immigration matters, others continued to need help in housing and employment matters, and one still needed legal help as her ex-husband continued to threaten her.

Raksha and it employees have all averred that no two abused women are the same. According to *Raksha* (and as the findings from the survey have shown), these women have different backgrounds, their experiences (of abuse and otherwise) are not the same, their responses and reactions to their situations of abuse are different, and consequently their requirements for resources from *Raksha* vary. Given the wide variety of women, with a multitude of different requirements that *Raksha* has to cater to, one of its first concerns has been to recruit staff and volunteers who speak different (South Asian) languages, and have expertise in different fields, so as to help construct an ambience of assurance, confidentiality and safety. The staff and volunteers are of different South Asian national origins; they speak different South Asian languages, and practice (or are born into) different religions and their professional backgrounds are counseling, health care, law, and victim assistance, among others.

One of *Raksha*'s chief concerns, as mentioned earlier, has been to make an abused woman feel safe with them. Most women seek their initial help from *Raksha* through telephone calls. While some call *Raksha* themselves, others have their friends or family members call *Raksha* first. The first phone call is when *Raksha* draws on its linguistic capital to develop the trust and confidence of the woman. The ability to speak in a familiar language with a culturally sensitive person is for the abused woman the first

sign of reassurance and support. And, for the *Raksha* staff, this is how they set the course for assuring the woman of their credibility and the safety of the space of *Raksha*.

When a woman first calls, most often than not, she appears scared and is often hesitant to tell her entire story. Because of the trauma she has been subject to and the systems that she may have been exposed to, she is frightened to tell her story, frightened because she is not sure whether her story will stay confidential within *Raksha*. This fear makes her hesitant to trust her environment and *Raksha*. Aparna says,

> Many women are scared; they are frightened… They don't know who we know, and if we are going to tell their batterers.

Aqsa adds,

> When I meet them for individual counseling, they are scared. They don't want to meet at the (*Raksha*) office. They would ask if they could meet somewhere else, like at the station. It's because they are still scared.

For an abused woman, the instant she steps out of the home (she views as unsafe), in order to change the situation, she finds every place and every person untrustworthy. While she doesn't trust the publicness of *Raksha*, the anonymity of a train station, for instance, offers her a relative degree of relief and security. This, again, is consistent with the finding in the previous section that abused South Asian immigrant women find some public places to be safe and secure.

Depending on the abusive situation (and its duration) the individual woman has been in, this fear can affect her self-esteem and self-confidence for varying periods of time. According to Rita,

> They are scared to drive a car; they are scared to go to certain places; they are scared of doing things that they haven't done before. And, some are scared that their husbands might find out where they are, and that he might stalk them or do something to them.

However, as they gain more independence and become more self-sufficient, over time, the feeling of fear decreases. But sometimes, for some women, a particular incident or a particular place might revive the feelings of fear. Therefore, even though

abused women find public places to be safe, there is a latent and innate fear of some places (probably places that have some (perceived or otherwise) association with the abuser or his acquaintances). In the eventuality of the recurrence of a fear, Raksha encourages the woman to attend their support group sessions in order to learn to tackle the future occurrence of such incidents.

Often there is no 'first or common thing' that a woman wants on her initial contact with *Raksha*. While some may need only one resource, there are some who need more than one. For those women who have separated from their husbands, or are in the process of separating, their first question often pertains to shelter[13], especially if the woman is undocumented, and has children. But there are women who have planned 'leaving home', and have accordingly made alternate arrangements (like saving money) for accommodation and employment before they leave.

Then there are women who do not leave their husbands. They stay in the marriage and improve their relationship. They, however, continue to seek telephone support, relief, advice and counseling at *Raksha*. Some work on their self-esteem, and stand up to their husbands refusing to take the abuse, and many have been able to make their homes relatively safer.

One of the more important services that *Raksha* offers its clients is its support group sessions. The support group, often referred to by *Raksha* and its clients as 'group', has been designed for abused women who are divorced or separated or are thinking about either. The purpose of group was to create a deliberate atmosphere of support around abuse, abused women and their lives[14]. The group is basically 'open' inasmuch that the every group has different women at each fortnightly meeting, though it is ensured that a set of 'core' members are present at every meeting. Group at *Raksha*

[13] Interview with Aqsa Farooqui.
[14] Interview with Rita Patel.

begins with an introduction about the purpose of the sessions, followed by a brief talk about the women in (that particular) day's group, the importance of confidentiality is reiterated, and the members are reminded that *Raksha* is a safe space where they can come and talk without any fear and inhibitions, whatsoever. This protocol is then followed by an activity, which is either pre-planned by the staff, or, decided by the group. These activities are designed to help the women understand and tackle their conflicts, and other everyday problems. 'Group' to these women has been purgative, therapeutic and educative. They have always responded very positively and enthusiastically to it. 'Group' also (without intending to) helps women make friends, and do away with the social and spatial isolation that had been limiting them during their married and immigrant life. It creates an aura of support, and members provide support to each other, too. Rita says of the women's response to 'group',

> … these women, before they come here are pretty isolated, because they don't know anybody who can relate to them, because they feel judged by almost every other person they meet. So, to come in a room where there are other women with similar issues… it makes them feel better.

The social support group creates and contributes to creating an atmosphere of safeness about the offices of *Raksha*. The abused women meet other survivors, and the commonality of their victimization serves as a kind of bond, on the basis of which they develop and sustain new and more meaningful friendships. They also provide support to each other. Some of the older (both in terms of years, and in terms of their being at *Raksha*) women aid the newer women in building trust and confidence. While some women come to these sessions on their own, driving their cars, *Raksha* volunteers chauffeur most of them. After the formal activities in the group are over, the women sit and share (sometimes, over a pizza) information about jobs and accommodation, exchange personal tidbits and news, extend support, and sometimes, just sit and make small talk.

In my meeting with the women in the support groups, I noticed the easy flow of conversation, the camaraderie and the uninhibited exchange of information, and support between them. I couldn't help but discern the ease and comfort they shared in the office space of *Raksha*. I couldn't help thinking how much 'at home' they seemed. When I shared my observations with Aparna, she said, "But this is their home. They feel safe here. This is their home".

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Public awareness of domestic violence and wife abuse is a hundred years old. Scholastic intervention in this social problem is a lot younger, and has more or less been confined to the understanding of the factors and causes that contribute to the problem and underlie it. In all these efforts and explorations, the spatial aspects of the problem of wife abuse have drawn less attention. Space is crucial in incidences of domestic violence as the latter occurs within the delineations of a space called home. And, it is significant to understand the perspectives of abused women in connection with this space, which has conventionally been held synonymous with safety, security and refuge, and particularly so for women. Further, it is vital to integrate experiences of social and spatial isolation and notions regarding the dichotomy of public and private space in this perspective so as to have a comprehensive view of the South Asian immigrant woman's experience of wife abuse. Given the unique cultural context of South Asian upbringing, and the impact of the above spatial concerns, experiences and responses to domestic violence in this immigrant community are different. This study relates to the specific case of South Asian immigrant women, who have been abused in marriage.

This research began by addressing two sets of questions. The first set of questions pertained to an abused South Asian immigrant woman's notions of home and safe space, and how these notions were influenced by social and spatial isolation and by notions regarding public and private spaces. The second set of questions related to the

emergence of safe spaces like *Raksha*, and their role in the lives of abused immigrant women.

In response to the first set of questions, there were five significant findings. First, not surprisingly, the women I surveyed did not find their husband's homes to be safe spaces – neither before the start of the abuse, nor after. Also, their social and spatial separation from their homeland, and isolation within the new country further aggravated their situations of abuse in these spaces.

Second, subsequent to not finding their homes to be safe, these women sought and found refuge in alternate spaces, some public (like parks and malls) and some private (like the homes of their siblings and friends), both during the period of abuse, and after leaving their abusive husbands. Thus, public space, usually deemed to be unsafe for women, was what abused women considered to be safe.

Thirdly, the study found, similar to the findings of Abraham (2000), that not only does an abused South Asian immigrant woman get increasingly isolated, both socially and spatially, following abuse, but her spatial confinement also limits her access to significant information (on immigration laws and otherwise) that could potentially prevent her from being abused.

The fourth finding, which was perhaps counterintuitive, was that the spatial distance of the South Asian woman (because of immigration) from her homeland had actually helped her in ending her abusive relationship. Immigration had given her options to alternate safe spaces. Even though this distance had resulted in her spatial isolation from a support system, it had simultaneously allowed her to break away from social taboos that (may have) had restricted her quest for and, perhaps, access to other safe spaces.

Finally and most interestingly, I found that the spaces abused women had previously perceived to be safe (before abuse) lost their connotations of safety and

security after the onset of abuse. These supposedly neutral spaces (mainly the women's parental homes) remained unsafe even after the women had walked out of their abusive situations, as they did not consider returning back to their home countries a safe option. It is therefore, seen that domestic violence not only renders the woman's home unsafe, but causes formerly safe spaces to become unsafe.

With regard to my second set of questions, I found that *Raksha* does provide an alternative to abused South Asian immigrant women. Feminist scholars have challenged the concept of home as a safe haven (Bograd, 1988). However, my studies found that abused South Asian immigrant women do associate safety with home. It is just that they do not associate safety with the homes they had shared with their abusers. Abused women feel safe at *Raksha*, a public space, and thus, theoretically speaking, *Raksha* could be considered to be their home, their safe haven, even though they actually spend very little time there. For an abused woman from South Asia, *Raksha* has been the place where she has been able to put her abused life together. It has been the place where she has learnt to step out of the shadows of her traditional (South Asian) obligations to her abuser and the home she shared with him. It has been the place where she has learned to rely on herself. It has been the place where she has been able to relocate her identity. It has been the place where she knew she would be safe.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

Aiming to end all forms of abuse on any person in any and all spaces, public and/ or private is a mammoth task for the state and non-profit organizations. But in small, but meaningful, and gradual steps, this can be achieved. In the case of South Asian immigrant families, the ideal first step should begin from outside the home, from within the community. Non-profit organizations should direct resources at tackling the community's willing ignorance and denial of the problem, and concepts about women's

role in space - both inside and outside home. This could only be addressed through educating and increasing awareness, amongst both men and women. However, considering that these communal notions of a woman's place in familial and societal space have centuries of rootedness, the process may take years. Therefore, efforts of Raksha and similar SAWOs across the US should continue to simultaneously target the financial and spatial empowerment of women.

This study identifies notions regarding home, safe space and public-private delineations of space (especially, in connection with women) to be complicated and deep-rooted. In the process of eradicating domestic violence, the elimination of these notions remains most difficult. In order to do away with these patriarchal notions, it is important that in addition to educating immigrant South Asian communities, that SAWOs in the United States join forces with extant Women's organizations in South Asia and target a grass root level education of all (men and women) and empowerment of women.

This research identifies the South Asian Woman's Organizations as fulfilling a void, both social and cultural, that mainstream agencies were unable to fulfill. According to some of the women who were surveyed, they had chosen to go to *Raksha* because they felt that they would be better understood there. There is, therefore, a need for more 'culturally' safe spaces to be created to help abused immigrant women. Since, there is a dearth of funding available to these organizations from the community, it is important for the federal and/ or state governments to continue to allocate funds to them.

This study also noted that the IMFA and the IRCA proved detrimental to immigrant women in situations of abuse. The former act complicates and lengthens the process for dependent spouses to attain legal immigrant status, and the latter denies undocumented immigrants social benefits. The passage of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), 1998 has, thus, been very helpful to abused immigrant women, in that it allows undocumented women to stay in the country (pending a decision about their

immigrant status) as long as they provide proof of their abuse in a court of law. However, VAWA 1998 also requires that the abused woman should have been in the country for at least a period of three years. This clause restricts certain abused immigrant women from seeking the help of the state in alleviating their abusive situations. It is, therefore, necessary for the Act to be altered to incorporate those abused immigrant women who have been in this country for a period less than three years. Further, since their immigrant status precludes them from availing of social benefits, the VAWA should be further modified to include a clause that grants domestically abused immigrant women refugee status, so that they would be able to avail of social benefits.

On the whole, then, I hope that this thesis raised provocative questions both conceptual and policy-related, that can address issues that relate to the welfare of not only abused immigrant women in the United States, but also of women who are marginalized in different societies across the world. I also hope, that this research pointed to the need of continuing research in this area whereby different concepts of space, and their impact on domestic violence can be examined.

APPENDIX A:

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questions should take you about 15-20 minutes to answer. Please **DO NOT** write your name on any part of this survey. You do not have to participate in this survey if you so wish. Raksha shall not know of your participation or non-participation. Your non-participation in the survey will not affect your services at Raksha.

I. YOUR BACKGROUND:

1. Year of Birth: _____
2. Place and Country of Birth: _____
3. Highest level of Education: _____
4. Religion: _____
5. County and state of current residence: _____
6. What language do you speak at home? **(Check (√) the answer that applies to you.)**

   _ Bengali
   _ English
   _ Gujarati
   _ Hindi
   _ Punjabi
   _ Urdu
   _ Other (please specify): _____

7. How often did you use English?

   _ At least once a day
   _ At least once a week
   _ At least once a month
   _ At least once in two months
   _ At least once in 6 months
   _ At least once in a year

8. Did you work for a salary in your home country? Yes No
   (Circle the answer that applies to you)
9. Year of Marriage: _____
10. Place, country where marriage took place _____
11. How familiar do you think you were about the US and ways of life in the country before you came here? **(Check (√) the answer that applies to you.)**

    _ Very familiar;
    _ Familiar;
    _ Not very familiar
    _ Not familiar at all

12. Year of Arrival in the US: _____

13. Do you have relatives or friends in the US? (**You may check (√) more than one answer)**

_ Father
_ Mother
_ Sister (s)
_ Brother (s)
_ Relatives
_ Distant relatives
_ Friends
_ Others (please specify): _____
_ Nobody

14. Which of the following statements would apply to you?

_ I arrived in the US first, and then got married (**Skip to question 16**)
_ I got married in my home country and then came to the US

15. How long did you live with your husband in your home country before coming to the US?

_ Less than 1 month
_ 1 – 6 months;
_ 6 months to 1year;
_ 1 to 2 years;
_ More than 2 years

16. When did your husband begin to abuse you?

(**Check (√) the answer that is closest to your experience**).

_ Immediately after marriage
_ 0 – 1 year after marriage
_ 1 – 2 years after marriage
_ 2 – 3 years after marriage
_ 3 - 4 years after marriage
_ 4 –5 years after marriage
_ More than 5 years after marriage

II. PERIOD BEFORE THE ABUSE

This section will ask you to answer questions that relate to the time period between your marriage and the start of abuse.

17. Which of the following places did you frequently visit?

(**You may check (√) more than one answer)**

_ Parents' home
_ Sister's home
_ Brother's home
_ Relative's home
_ Friend's home
_ Neighbor's home
_ Malls
_ Cinemas
_ Parks
_ Children's school
_ Workplace
_ Temple, Mosque, Church, etc.
_ Educational Institution
_ Others (please specify):_____

18. Where did you feel safe? (**You may check (√) more than one answer)**

_ The home I shared with my husband
_ Parents' home
_ Sister's home
_ Brother's home
_ Relative's home
_ Friend's home
_ Neighbor's home
_ Malls
_ Cinemas
_ Parks
_ Children's school
_ Workplace
_ Temple, Mosque, Church, etc.
_ Educational Institution
_ Others (please specify):_____

19. Why did you feel safe in this/ these places? (**Write in your own words**)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

_____

20. How frequently did you communicate with the following people?

		Once a day	Once a week	Once a month	Once a year	Never
i.	Mother	____	____	____	____	____
ii.	Father	____	____	____	____	____
iii.	Sister (s)	____	____	____	____	____
iv.	Brother(s)	____	____	____	____	____
v.	Relatives	____	____	____	____	____
vi.	Friends	____	____	____	____	____
vii.	Neighbors	____	____	____	____	____
viii.	Others (please specify):					
	_____	____	____	____	____	____

III. PERIOD AFTER THE ABUSE

This section will ask you to answer questions that relate to the time period after the abuse began till the time you decided to go to Raksha.

21. Which of the following places did you frequently visit?

(**You may check (√) more than one answer)**

_ Parents' home
_ Sister's home
_ Brother's home
_ Relative's home
_ Friend's home
_ Neighbor's home
_ Malls
_ Cinemas
_ Parks
_ Children's school
_ Workplace
_ Temple, Mosque, Church, etc.
_ Educational Institution
_ Others (please specify):_____

22. Where did you feel safe? (**You may check (√) more than one answer)**

_ The home I shared with my husband
_ Parents' home
_ Sister's home
_ Brother's home
_ Relative's home
_ Friend's home
_ Neighbor's home
_ Malls
_ Cinemas
_ Parks
_ Children's school
_ Workplace
_ Temple, Mosque, Church, etc.)
_ Educational Institution
_ Others (please specify):_____

23. Why did you feel safe in this/ these places? **(Write in your own words)**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

24. How frequently did you communicate with the following people?

		Once a day	Once a week	Once a month	Once a year	Never
i.	Mother	____	____	____	____	____
ii.	Father	____	____	____	____	____
iii.	Sister (s)	____	____	____	____	____
iv.	Brother(s)	____	____	____	____	____
v.	Relatives	____	____	____	____	____
vi.	Friends	____	____	____	____	____
vii.	Neighbors	____	____	____	____	____
viii.	Others (please specify):					
	_____	____	____	____	____	____

IV. AFTER RAKSHA:

25. How did you learn about Raksha? (**You may check (√) more than one answer)**

_ Newspaper
_ Television
_ At community functions/ get-togethers
_ From a friend
_ From the Internet/ Web
_ Other (please specify): _____

26. How did you first get to Raksha? (**Check (√) the answer that applies)**

_ I took public transportation
_ I drove there in my car
_ A friend took me there
_ A volunteer from Raksha took me there
_ A neighbor took me there
_ A family member took me there
_ Other (please specify): _____

27. What were your reasons for contacting Raksha?

(You may check (√) more than one answer.)

_ Was close to where you lived
_ Legal help (for divorce, child's custody, etc.)
_ Help on immigration matters
_ Help to look for a place to live away from your husband
_ Help to be able to sustain yourself and you children financially
_ Help to be able to return to your home country
_ Did not know anyone else who would help you
_ Did not have any money or resources to start a new life
_ Lack of fluency in English to contact a non-South Asian organization

28. Why do you continue to return to Raksha? **(Write in your own words)**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

29. How do you go to Raksha now?

_ I take the public transportation
_ I drive there in my car
_ A friend takes me there
_ A volunteer from Raksha takes me there
_ A neighbor takes me there
_ A family member takes me there
_ Other (please specify): _____

I greatly appreciate the time, energy and effort that you have put in to complete this questionnaire. Thank you very much.

APPENDIX B:

COVER LETTER ATTACHED TO THE SURVEY

June 15, 2002.

Dear Friends of Raksha,

I am Sipra Pati, a Masters student in Geography working on a research project entitled, "Spatial Aspects of Wife Abuse: A case study of South Asian Immigrant Families in Atlanta," under the supervision of Dr. Kavita Pandit, Department of Geography at the University of Georgia, (706) 542 1058. I am interested in learning more about the places of safety and fear for women who have suffered abuse from their husbands. I am also interested in learning about the role that Raksha has played in your lives.

I would greatly appreciate it if you would provide the information required in the attached questionnaire. The questionnaire is designed to take approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete, and the information that you provide will remain completely **anonymous**. This survey is voluntary and will not identify you in any way. Although Raksha is aware that I am conducting this survey, individual survey forms will not be available to Raksha. Raksha will not know of your participation or non-participation in the survey. Your participation or non-participation in this survey will not affect the services you receive from Raksha.

You may finish the survey now, and put it in the drop box provided, or you may mail the survey to me at a later date. A stamped envelope, addressed to me, is attached to the survey. The completed survey should reach me by the 25th of June 2002.

For those of you, to whom this questionnaire is being mailed, I will be mailing you a follow-up letter in about ten days time, through Raksha.

The results of this survey will form part of my thesis. I also intend to publish the results of this survey. None of these will carry any reference to your individual participation.

I shall be extremely privileged if you would participate in this survey, and give me your valued opinions. I thank you very much for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

Sipra Pati
Masters Student
Department of Geography
University of Georgia, Athens
GA 30602.
Email: spati@arches.uga.edu
Tel. (706) 549 1195

For questions or problems about your rights, please call or write: Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D., Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606 A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542 6514; Email IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX C:

ILLUSTRATIVE LIST OF GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEWS WITH THE STAFF OF RAKSHA.

1. How did *Raksha* come into being?
2. How was it determined that there was need for an organization like *Raksha* to be established?
3. Do you think it is essential to have an organization of yours? Why so?
4. Was there an effort by the South Asian community in Atlanta/ Georgia that went into the forming of *Raksha*?
5. How did you start off? What were the things you felt were more needed to start? Like, office space, telephone services, connections with the local state officials, health officials, etc.
6. What were the problems that you encountered in the process of establishing *Raksha*?
7. Tell me something about your service in the area of domestic abuse. What are your activities and programs?
8. Tell me something about your support group sessions. Could you give me an example of how it is conducted? How many women come to these sessions? How often do you hold them? Do you think there is a need to increase or decrease the number of sessions?
9. Coming to your domestic abuse clientele: What do you think is unique about the abuse problem in the South Asian community? Tell me something about these women, in general.

10. How do abused women contact you? How do you let them know that you are there to help them?
11. Do they contact you by themselves or does someone (a well wisher) operate as an intermediary?
12. If they contact you over phone, what kind of basic information do you keep from them?
13. What are the first thing abused women ask for/ their first reaction on contact with you?
14. What are the other kinds of help that they seek from you?
15. What do you think makes them take the decision to come to *Raksha* (seek outside help)?
16. What do you think was deterring them from taking such a decision?
17. Do any of them seek help to return to their home countries?
18. Why is it do you think that they do not want to return to their home countries?
19. Did any of the women ever express to you what they thought 'home' to be? Did they associate it with their personal safety?
20. Do they consider *Raksha* and its officials to be safe? Do they express it any way?
21. What kinds of problems do you encounter in communicating with these women?

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